THE MOTOR BOYS OVERLAND

CLARENCE YOUNG

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FOR NEARLY TEN MILES THE AUTOS WERE CLOSE TOGETHER.—*Page* 185.

The Motor Boys Overland

OR

A LONG TRIP FOR FUN AND FORTUNE

By CLARENCE YOUNG
Author of
"The Racer Boys Series" and "The Jack Ranger Series."

NEW YORK
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PREFACE.

Dear Boys:

HERE we have the second volume of "The Motor Boys Series," a line of books relating to the doings of some bright and up-to-date youths, on wheels, at home and abroad.

In the first volume of the series, called "The Motor Boys," the writer told how Bob, Ned and Jerry won several important races, including that which brought to them a much-wished-for prize, a grand touring car.

The car won, there was nothing to do but to take a long trip, and in this present book, "The Motor Boys Overland," are given the particulars of a journey in the automobile to the great West. On the way the boys fall in with an old miner, who has the secret of a lost gold mine of great value. The lads decide to take the miner to the lost mine in their touring car, and the long and perilous journey among the mountains is begun. Enemies also hear of the wonderful lost mine, and then begins a wild race, to see who shall get there first and claim the riches.

This "Motor Boys Series" will be continued by

a third volume, to be called "The Motor Boys in Mexico." I earnestly hope the boys will find the stories to their liking. I can assure all it has been a pleasure to pen them, for the writer is something of an automobile enthusiast himself, and some of the experiences on the road have been taken from life.

CLARENCE YOUNG.

March 22, 1906.

THE MOTOR BOYS OVERLAND.

CHAPTER I.

AN AUTOMOBILE RACE.

THERE was a whizz of rubber-tired wheels, a cloud of dust and the frightened yelping of a dog as a big, red touring automobile shot down the road.

"You nearly ran over him, Chunky!" exclaimed Jerry Hopkins, to the stout youth at his side.

"That's what you did, Bob Baker!" chimed in Ned Slade, leaning over from the rear seat of the auto. "I thought you said you were an expert."

"I didn't come within five feet of the pup," answered Bob Baker, giving the steering wheel a twist to avoid a chicken that scooted across the country road.

"Never mind—miss as good as a mile—we certainly are skating along—never say die—hit a dog, biff! bang! up in the air—down again—bust a tire—break your leg—kill the animal—off again—whoop!"

"Say, Andy Rush, if you're going to talk as fast as that the first time Chunky speeds the machine, I'm going to get out!" cried Jerry, with a laugh. "There's excitement enough without you making any more."

"All right, fellows, I'll keep quiet," agreed Andy, who was a small, nervous chap, never still for a moment, and so full of energy that he talked, as Jerry sometimes said, "like a house afire."

Bob leaned forward and pulled one of the levers. The auto slowed down, as the low-speed gear came into play, and bowled along under a stretch of shady trees.

"Fifteen miles in thirty minutes," remarked the stout lad, pulling out his watch. "Not so bad for a starter, eh, Ned?"

"The machine certainly can go!" observed Jerry.

"I didn't have the full-speed lever on, either," remarked Bob, who was called "Chunky" by his companions, because of his fleshiness. He turned off the gasolene as the auto came under a large chestnut tree, and the four boys stretched out comfortably on the leather-upholstered seats.

There was Bob Baker, a lad of fifteen years, son of Andrew Baker, a rich banker; Ned Slade, sixteen years old, the only son of Aaron Slade, a department store proprietor, and Jerry Hopkins, the son of a widow, Mrs. Julia Hopkins.

These three were faithful chums, seldom apart. With them was a mutual friend, Andy Rush. All the boys lived in the village of Cresville, not far from Boston.

The three first named had, the week before the story opens, come into possession of a fine touring car, which they had won as the first prize of a motor-cycle meet, given by the Cresville Athletic Club, as related in the first volume of this series, entitled "The Motor Boys."

In that was told how they had incurred the enmity of Noddy Nixon, a town bully, who had robbed the mill of Amos Judson of one thousand dollars, which crime the Motor Boys were instrumental in fastening on Noddy.

In consequence of the pending disclosure of his guilt, Noddy had fled from town, a short time before the races, in his father's automobile. Bill Berry, a town ne'er-do-well, accompanied him. Not long after Noddy had fled in the terror of his guilt being found out, he sent back a letter threatening vengeance on the three boys, whom he accused as being responsible for the fact that he had to leave home.

But the Motor Boys, as they now called themselves, cared little for this in view of the pleasures they anticipated when they got the automobile. It had come in due time; a fine affair, with all the latest improvements and attachments, and

was a car capable of making a trip almost anywhere.

The company from whom the auto was purchased sent an expert out to Cresville with it, to instruct the boys in the running of the machine. They learned readily, and were soon able to make short trips on the country roads surrounding the village. This was the first time they had made an extended trip, and the drawing of lots had given Bob the chance to drive the auto, with the result that he nearly came to grief when the dog unexpectedly ran across the road.

For about half an hour the three chums and Andy rested in the shade. It was a pleasant fall afternoon, and though the sun was warm there was a cool breeze.

"Whose turn to crank her up?" asked Bob, for, of course, it could not be expected of him, in charge of the steering wheel, to start the engine.

"I guess it's mine," came from Ned, with a sort of groan. His arm still ached from the previous turning of the flywheel.

"I'll do it—lots of fun—first time I ever had a chance—let me—good for my muscle—whoop!" exclaimed Andy, bustling from the car.

"Oh, it's good for your muscle, all right enough," observed Ned. "Go on, I'll not stop you."

It was harder work than Andy had anticipated,

but he managed to give the crank a few turns and spin the heavy flywheel around. Bob switched on the spark, turned the gasolene into the cylinders, and soon there was a throbbing that told the engine had started. Andy jumped to one side and nearly toppled over.

"Did you think I'd run you down?" asked Bob.

"I don't know anything about autos," answered Andy.

"She can't go until I connect the speed-gears," explained Bob, with something of a superior air. "Hop in, Andy!"

Andy climbed back to his rear seat, Bob threw the lever forward to first speed, and the car, movingly slowly at first, but with increasing swiftness, started down the road.

"Look out for dogs!" advised Ned.

"We don't want roast chicken for supper, so you needn't bother to kill any," came from Jerry.

"I can steer as good as either of you," exclaimed the stout lad. "You nearly hit a man the other day, Jerry, and I guess you've forgotten, Ned, how you broke down one of Mr. Smith's shade trees. I'm not as bad as that."

Honk! honk! sounded down the road in the rear of the boys.

"Here comes another auto," said Jerry. "Keep over to one side, Bob."

Honk! honk! This time it was Bob who

blew his horn to let the oncomers know some one was ahead of them. The noise of the approaching car sounded nearer.

"Better keep well over, Chunky," advised Ned.

"I'm not going to give 'em more than half the road," answered Bob, firmly. "If they want a race they can have it, too."

He threw the third-speed clutch into place, and the boys' car shot ahead so suddenly that Andy was nearly toppled out of his seat. The red auto dashed down the road.

Behind it, at a swift pace, there came a big, green affair, almost twice the size of the Cresville machine. It was going at a great pace, a lone man occupying the steering seat, and no one being in back. As the green car shot past the red one, the solitary rider gave three toots to his horn. Bob answered, and then, before the other boys could stop him he advanced his spark, turned on more gasolene, and was away after the green dragon like a streak of red fire.

"What are you going to do?" yelled Ned.

"See if I can beat him!" exclaimed Bob.

"You're crazy! That's a ninety horse-power car and ours is only forty!"

"I'm going to try," repeated Bob, between his clenched teeth.

It looked like a hopeless undertaking. The green car was a quarter of a mile ahead before Bob

could get his machine speeded up. When he did, however, the new auto ran along swiftly and easily.

Bob shut off his power temporarily and then, with a quick yank, pulled the lever to full speed ahead. Then he turned on the spark and gasolene. The red auto seemed to double its already swift motion.

The car swayed from side to side, and the boys, except Bob, who had a firm grip of the wheel, were bounced up into the air, again and again. Bob had on big goggles, and, with head bent low, was watching the road like a hawk ready to pounce on a chicken.

"We're gaining on him!" he muttered, and he tooted the horn. Back a faint, answering blast came.

Indeed, it was evident that the red auto, though a smaller and less powerful machine, was creeping up on its rival. The lone chauffeur glanced back, saw the pursuing car, and turned on full power.

For a few moments he increased his lead. But Bob advanced his spark further, and turned on a trifle more of gasolene. The red auto once more leaped forward.

"We've got him!" cried Bob. "He can't get another inch out of his, and I haven't used the accelerator pedal yet. We'll beat him!"

"If we don't all break our necks!" exclaimed Jerry, holding to his seat.

"Terrible fast—takes your breath—shakes the liver-pin out of you—loosens all your teeth—great sport—smash the machine—never say die—don't give up the ship—whoop!" yelled Andy, as he slid down to the bottom of the car, unable any longer to remain upright.

Slowly the red car crept up on the green one. The dust arose in clouds about both machines. The autos swayed from the terrific speed, but Bob held the wheel firm and was ready to shut off power and apply the emergency brake in a second. The man in front again glanced back, and did not seem to relish being passed by mere boys in a smaller car than his. He was making desperate efforts to draw away.

The distance between the machines lessened. Bob was watching his opportunity.

"Now we've got him!" he cried. "Here we go!"

He pushed down the accelerator pedal, used only to give a momentary burst of speed. The red car shot forward and the front wheels almost lapped the rear ones of the machine in the lead.

There was a slight turn to the road, just where Bob had decided to pass his rival. A clump of trees hid the view, excepting for a short distance ahead. Just as the boys' auto was on the point of

making the turn and passing the green one, Ned glanced up and gave a shout of terror.

Right in front was a load of hay, overturned in the road, and both cars, at full speed, were dashing straight for it!

CHAPTER II.

HO FOR THE WEST!

"PUT on the brake!" yelled Ned.

"Shut off the power!" shouted Jerry.

A frightened cry came from the farmer whose load of fodder had overturned in the road. He was unhitching his horses, and jumped to one side as he saw two big autos bearing down on him.

"You're in for a spill, lads!" called the man in the green car. At that instant he applied his emergency brake and shut off the power. His car came to such a sudden stop that he was thrown from his seat, high into the air.

Bob seemed unable, from the very terror of fright, to make a move to stop the auto he was steering, and clung to the wheel like grim death.

"Put on the brake!" yelled Ned again. "We'll be killed!"

The load of hay was not ten feet in advance. Bob gave the wheel a sudden twist. The red car shot to one side, out into a ditch along the road. It skidded on two wheels, the boys were nearly thrown out, and bounced high in the air.

With another quick twist, Bob sent the car straight ahead. Then another turn of the wheel and he was back in the road again!

He had passed the obstruction, going between it and the green auto, and had reached the highway in safety after as daring a bit of steering as ever a boy undertook. Then he shut off the power and applied the brakes hard, the car coming to a stop with a groan and screech as the emergency band gripped the axle.

"Whew! That was a close shave!" came from Jerry, as he drew a long breath.

"A little too near for comfort!" was Ned's opinion.

"Bet your life!" was all Andy could say, his rapid fire of words failing to discharge this time.

"I thought it was the only thing to do," remarked the stout steersman. "I was afraid to stop too suddenly, and I figured we just had room enough to get through. But I wouldn't do it again."

"Speaking of sudden stops, I wonder what has become of the man in the green car?" spoke Jerry. "We must go back and find out."

The four lads leaped from their machine and ran back past the load of hay. The farmer was rapidly walking about in a circle, wringing his hands and crying:

"He's killed! He's killed! I know he is!"

With rather anxious hearts the boys hurried around to the other side of the big pile of dried grass. As they reached the place they saw a man attired in an automobile suit, with big goggles on, wiggle out from the mass of hay. He pulled several wisps from his hair and then saw the boys.

"Did you shoot right through the pile and come out on the other side?" he asked.

"We ran around it," explained Bob. "We beat you," he added, not without pride.

"So I see. It came pretty near being the end of all of us. You're a plucky lad. I don't mind being beaten by you. I thought I had a good car, but yours is better."

"Ours is much lighter; I guess that's why we went ahead," returned Jerry, willing to concede something to a vanquished rival. "But are you hurt?"

The man carefully felt of different parts of his body. Then he took off his goggles and looked over as much as he could see of himself.

"I don't seem to be," he said, finally, with a laugh. "It was like falling into a feather bed to land in that hay-pile the way I did. That's all that saved me. I wonder how my machine stood the emergency brake."

He examined his car carefully, and was apparently satisfied that no injury had been done by the sudden stopping of it.

"Where is he?" asked the farmer, suddenly appearing from behind the hay. "Is he dead?" And then he seemed to realize his error and joined in the laugh that followed.

"No, I'm not dead yet," replied the owner of the green car. "Well," he went on, "I must be going. Are you boys coming along? If you are, no more races."

"We'll have to go back to Cresville," answered Bob. "We promised to return for supper."

The man bade the boys good-by and soon the big, green dragon was throbbing down the road in a cloud of dust. The boys, finding they could not help the farmer in his trouble, got in their machine and, promising to send help from the first farmhouse they passed, they left the owner of the hay and were soon speeding toward Cresville.

"Isn't this glorious!" exclaimed Jerry, as the auto sped along. "I wish we could take a long trip."

"Why can't we?" asked Ned.

"We talked of a tour when we found we had a chance to get a car," put in Chunky. "I for one would like to go out West."

"Ho for the West!" piped up Andy. "Over the plains—herds of cattle—cowboys in chase—rattlesnakes and horned toads—sandy deserts— Indians—bang! Shoot 'em up! Lots of excitement —take me along—whoop!"

"Easy!" pleaded Jerry. "One thing at a time, Andy. Haven't we had excitement enough for one day?"

"We ought to make a strike to go on a western trip, though," spoke Ned, in serious tones. "Here we have a car that we could cross the continent in. Let's speak about it at home. It can't do any harm. Maybe the folks will let us go."

"It's worth trying for," said Jerry. "What do you say, Chunky?"

"I'm with you," replied Bob. "It will be the best sport ever. But wouldn't we have to wait until next spring? It's fall, and if we go West it may be very cold, with lots of snow soon."

"We can bear off to the south," said Jerry.

"Sure enough," agreed Chunky.

That night, when the automobile had been safely put away in the barn at Bob's house, three anxious boys broached the subject to their respective parents. So insistent were they that it was not long before a general council was arranged. Mrs. Hopkins and Mr. Slade were induced to call at Mr. Baker's house, where, with the three boys, the whole subject was gone over.

"I'm afraid it's too much of an undertaking," said Mr. Baker.

"That's my idea," agreed Mr. Slade, and Mrs. Hopkins nodded to indicate that that was her view.

The boys set up a chorus of pleadings. The par-

ents had many objections. The distance was too great, the boys did not know enough about automobiles, they would lose their way and break down far from help. In fact, so many negative reasons were given that it looked as if the plan would not go through.

"Will you please wait ten minutes before you make a final decision?" asked Jerry, appealing to the trio of parents.

They agreed, wondering what he was about to do. Jerry got his hat and hurried from Mr. Baker's house. In a little while he returned, all out of breath.

"He'll be here in five minutes," said the boy.

"Who?" asked Mr. Slade.

"Mr. Wakefield." Jerry referred to Horace Wakefield, an instructor at the Athletic Club, who was quite a friend of the boys, and who himself had recently purchased an automobile. He lived near Mr. Baker.

"What's all this I hear about a trip to the West these boys are going to take?" asked Mr. Wakefield, a few minutes later, coming into the parlor where the conference was going on.

"You mean the trip they think they are going to take," corrected Mr. Slade, with a laugh. "I suppose Jerry told you it was all settled."

"To be honest, he wanted me to come over and settle it for him and his chums," replied the in-

structor. "He said there was some doubt about the feasibility of making the trip."

Mr. Baker explained how matters stood. He and the other parents were willing the boys should have a good time, he said, but did not want them to run into danger.

"Do you think they could make a trip away out West in their car?" asked Mr. Baker.

"From what I know of the boys, and from the build of their car, I have no doubt it could be done with perfect safety, as far as ordinary conditions are concerned," said Mr. Wakefield. "Of course, there will be some few troubles, but none that cannot be overcome with a little work. I think the trip is perfectly possible. In fact, you know, autos have gone clear across the continent."

"Then you think we ought to let the boys go?" asked Mr. Slade.

"I—think—you—ought to," replied the instructor, with purposed deliberateness, smiling at the anxious lads.

"Hurrah!" yelled Bob, forgetting that he was in the house.

"Lucky I thought to go and get him," spoke Jerry to Ned.

"I might add," went on Mr. Wakefield, "that I am going to make a trip as far as Chicago. If you decide to let the boys go, they could accompany me

that far, at least. It would be a good experience for them."

"Oh, dad! Please let us go!" pleaded Bob.

"Yes, yes!" chimed in Jerry and Ned.

There was a moment of silence, while the parents were gravely considering the matter. During it the boys could almost hear the beating of their own hearts.

"Well," began Mr. Baker, "I'm willing, if the rest of you are."

"I suppose I may as well say yes," spoke Mr. Slade.

"Then the only thing left for me to do is to agree with the majority," said Mrs. Hopkins, with a laugh.

"Westward ho!" fairly shouted Bob, and he began to do an impromptu jig until his father stopped him.

"We'll take Andy Rush along," said Ned, "and we'll start the first of the week!"

"Hark! What was that?" asked Mr. Baker, suddenly.

Out on the night air sounded an alarm.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD MILL ON FIRE.

THEY all rushed to windows and looked out into the night. Off to the north a dull red glare lighted the sky.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Baker.

"I can't see from here," replied Jerry.

"Come on, fellows! Let's go!" exclaimed Ned. He started for the door.

"Take the auto," suggested Bob. "No telling how far off it is."

The next instant the three boys were in the automobile shed, getting the machine ready for a start. The red glow in the sky increased. People began running past on their way to the fire.

There was a clatter and bang, a ringing of bells, and the one engine the town possessed, in all the glory of its brass and nickel plate, rushed past, as fast as the horses could drag it. The hose-cart followed.

"Hurry up or we'll miss the fun!" cried Ned to Bob, who was cranking the auto. Somehow,

Chunky could not get the engine started. At last he succeeded and the boys climbed to their seats.

"It's my turn to steer!" cried Jerry, and no one disputed him. He ran the car out of the side path, past the Baker home. On the stoop stood Mr. Slade, Mrs. Hopkins and Mr. Baker, watching the fire.

"Want to come along?" asked Ned.

"Let's go," exclaimed Mr. Slade, and he and Mr. Baker got their hats and were soon in the rear seat with Ned. Mrs. Hopkins, with a laugh, declined the trip. Jerry speeded the car ahead and soon was chugging on toward the fire, which was some distance outside of town.

On the road the automobilists passed scores of men and boys who were running at top speed. In their excitement many were yelling at the top of their voices.

"Where is it?" asked Bob of a group of boys.

"The old windmill!" was the answer.

"The place where we found the box Noddy Nixon stole from Mr. Judson!" cried Jerry, turning to his companions. "Queer, isn't it?"

"Maybe he got his toady, Jack Pender, to set the place afire so nothing would ever come out about it," suggested Bob.

"Hardly," ventured Jerry. "But what's the trouble up ahead?"

In advance could be seen quite a crowd of people

in a group about some object. Just then came a long-drawn-out whistle of a steam engine.

"The fire apparatus is stuck!" cried Ned. "The horses can't pull it!"

"I always thought that machine was too heavy for two horses," said Mr. Slade.

The auto soon came up to the scene of the trouble. The fire-engine had sunk deep down in a rut of the road and, pull as they did, the horses could not budge it.

"Lay hold of the wheels, boys!" called the driver of the apparatus. "Everybody give a hand!"

Willingly enough the crowd tried to aid. But the roads were soft and the engine was heavy. It seemed bound to stick fast.

"Hold on!" cried Jerry. "Let us through, will you? I have an idea!"

The crowd parted, the attention of the men and boys being attracted from the stranded engine.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mr. Baker.

"Give 'em a lift," replied Jerry. "I say, have you a rope?" the boy called to the driver of the steamer.

"Yes!" was the reply. "But we need more than a rope to get out of here."

"No, you don't! I'll show you!" shouted Jerry. He had brought the machine to a halt by throwing out the gear, but did not stop the gasolene engine.

He quickly fastened the rope to the rear axle of the auto.

"Now tie the other end to the engine and we'll pull you to the fire," the boy said.

The driver saw the feasibility of the scheme at once. He unhitched the straining horses, attached the cable to the pole and gave the word. Jerry threw on the clutch, there was a tightening of the rope and slowly but surely the engine was dragged from the mud hole. Then, once on solid ground, Jerry put on more speed, and, amid the cheers of the crowd, he started off at a swift pace, dragging the engine to the fire.

The hose-cart had gone on ahead and was waiting for the steamer. Power was soon up in the apparatus, and soon two streams were directed toward the mill, which was now a mass of flames.

There was no chance of saving it, such a start had the fire gained, and, in fact, the loss would be small if it burned down, but the fire company could not let slip a chance of going to the blaze. So the crew continued to squirt water, though most of it did little good. However, there was plenty of excitement, which suited the boys.

Those in the auto watched the old mill gradually being consumed. To the boys it brought a recollection of the time they had there made the final discovery of Noddy Nixon's villainy, and had practically forced him to admit his guilt. At last

the roof fell in, with a big shower of sparks, and the fire was practically out, though the steamer continued to pump water.

"Let's go home," suggested Mr. Baker. "We've seen enough."

"Oh, stay a while longer!" pleaded his son. "It's a fine moonlight night and it will be fun going home later."

"You boys can stay if you like," said the banker, "but home's the place for me, eh, Mr. Slade?"

The merchant agreed. So Jerry turned the auto toward Cresville and made a quick run, leaving Mr. Baker and Mr. Slade at their respective homes, and then he and the boys came back in the machine to the fire. They found most of the crowd gone, and the engine about to return to quarters.

"Do you want us to trail along and pull you again if you get stuck?" asked Bob of the engineer.

"Well, you might come in handy," was the answer. "We're much obliged to you, boys."

"Glad we were on deck," said Jerry. "However, I guess you will not need us again," and he sent the auto ahead at a good speed. "We'll take a little ride before we go home," he added to his chums.

It was a bright moonlight night, rather warm for the close of September, and the road was a fairly good one, so the boys skimmed along, their

thoughts on the western trip they were soon to make. For several miles they kept on. Suddenly Jerry yanked the levers and put on the brakes.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob, as the auto came to a stop.

"There," replied Jerry, pointing ahead.

The boys looked and saw, a little in advance, a tumble-down hut, from the window of which a light gleamed.

"That's queer," observed Jerry.

"What is, to see a light in a hut?" asked Bob.

"No; but in that particular one," replied Jerry. "I came past there day before yesterday and I noticed that the place is almost ready to fall apart. No one can be living in it, and any one who is there at night with a light is there for no good purpose."

"Let's take a look," suggested Bob.

Jerry shut off the power, took out the spark plug and the boys advanced cautiously, leaving the machine on one side of the road.

"Maybe there are tramps in there who won't like being spied on," said Ned.

"Don't make any noise," was Jerry's answer. "Be ready to run when I give the word."

On tiptoes the boys drew near the hut. Suddenly Bob grabbed Jerry by the arm.

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"Smell that?"

"Acetylene gas! Some one has been here with

a gas lamp, and within a few minutes," agreed Jerry, sniffing the peculiar odor.

"Isn't that a motor cycle leaning against the building?" asked Ned.

"Sure enough!" said Jerry. "Go slow, boys."

Walking like cats, they reached the window from which the light streamed. As they glanced inside they saw a sight that startled them.

Lying on a pile of rags in one corner of the bare room, in the glare of a candle, was an old man, with matted and unkempt hair and beard. His face showed pain and suffering. His clothes were old and ragged. But what attracted the attention of the boys was the fact that he wore about his waist a wide leather belt, with several compartments or pockets in it. The pockets were open and in them, as well as scattered on the floor in front of the man, were little piles of yellow, gleaming gold.

"He's a miner!" whispered Bob, hoarsely.

As the boys watched they heard the old man moan:

"Don't rob me! Don't take what little I have left! If I wasn't sick and suffering no one would dare play this trick on Jim Nestor!"

The next instant the boys heard a sound from the farther corner of the room. Out of the semi-darkness came a figure. It stooped over the old miner. There was the sound of a blow, a deep

groan—and then came darkness as the candle was extinguished.

Some one ran rapidly from the hut.

"Help! help!" called the miner, feebly. "Help! He's robbed me!"

CHAPTER IV.

A CHASE AFTER A RASCAL.

"AFTER him!" cried Jerry. "Catch the miserable thief!"

"You and Bob chase him, whoever he is!" called Ned. "I'll stay with the old miner here in the hut. He may be badly hurt."

"Hurry back to the auto!" shouted Jerry. "We can catch the thief in that."

As he spoke he looked ahead. A dark figure crossed the patch of moonlight in the rear of the hut. Then came a sound of a motor-cycle being started, and soon the chug-chug of the machine on the road told that the thief was escaping that way.

Jerry and Bob ran to the auto. In a trice Jerry had the engine cranked up. Bob jumped in, followed by his companion, and they put off down the road after the fleeing motor-cyclist, whom the moonlight plainly revealed.

"He can't get away from us!" exclaimed Jerry. "We will overhaul him in a jiffy!"

But Jerry reckoned without knowing who he was after. He did not dare put on full speed,

while the cyclist rashly had his machine going as fast as the explosions could follow one after the other. Besides, the thief had a good start with his light apparatus.

But Jerry determined to make the capture. He threw in the second speed gear and in a little while had lessened the distance between the auto and the motor-cycle.

"I wonder who it is?" asked Bob.

"Maybe we can tell," answered his chum. Jerry switched on the searchlight in the front of the auto. A dazzling pencil of illumination shot down the road.

In the white glare the figure of the motorist stood out sharply, and the red motor he rode could be plainly seen. At the sight both boys gave a start.

"Jack Pender!" exclaimed Bob.

"As sure as guns!" cried Jerry. "We must catch him!"

He was about to take chances and put on the third gear, when Pender, on his cycle, suddenly turned from the main road, and took a path leading through the fields.

"That ends it!" exclaimed Jerry. "No use trying to follow him. Our auto isn't built for 'cross-country riding."

He slowed up, turned around, and, with a last glance in the direction Noddy Nixon's former

toady and friend had taken, sent the car back toward the lonely hut.

Meanwhile, Ned, after his companions had started on the chase, had struck a match and lighted the candle in the cabin. He found the old miner, for such the boys correctly guessed him to be, lying unconscious in a corner. The belt, with the gold-dust was gone, though a few grains of the precious metal were scattered over the floor. Ned found a pail of water in the place. He bathed the old man's head and poured some of the fluid down his throat.

"Where am I? What happened?" asked the old man, opening his eyes. Then he passed his hand over his head. His fingers were stained with blood.

"You're all right," spoke Ned. "I'll take care of you. What's your name and where did you come from?"

"Don't let him rob me!" pleaded the old miner. "I have only a little gold, but I need it. I know where there is more, much more. I'll tell you, only don't hit me again. I'm sick, please don't strike poor Jim Nestor!"

"No one is going to hurt you," said Ned, in soothing tones, but the old man did not seem to comprehend. Ned felt of the miner's head, and found he had a bad cut on the back. He washed it off with some water and bound his handkerchief

around it. This seemed to ease the old man, and he sank into a doze.

"Well, of all the queer adventures, this is about the limit," spoke Ned, to himself.

The boy glanced about the hut. There was nothing to throw any light on the strange happenings. The candle flickered in the draught from the open door, and cast weird shadows. The man breathed like a person in distress. Ned was about to bathe the wounded man's head again, when the sound of the automobile returning was heard.

"What luck?" asked Ned, running to the door. "Did you get him?"

Whereupon Jerry told of the fruitless chase after Jack Pender. The three boys entered the hut, and Ned told his chums what he had done to relieve the miner.

"He's got a bad wound on the head," he went on. "I guess Pender must have hit him. Jack probably came this way, saw the old man in here sick, and unable to help himself, and watched his chance to rob him. There must have been considerable gold-dust in that belt."

Jerry stooped down and gathered a little from the floor.

"There is some mystery here," he said. "I think we had better get a doctor for the old miner. After he gets better he may talk. I'd like to get my hands on Pender for a little while."

"So would I," chorused Ned and Bob.

"The question is, shall we take the old man back in the auto with us, or run back to town and bring out a doctor?" went on Jerry.

"I think we'd better go get a doctor and fetch him here," was Ned's opinion. "It might injure the old man to move him."

This was voted the best plan. They made the unconscious miner as comfortable as possible on the bed of rags, placed the pail of water where he could reach it, and prepared to run back to town. Ned volunteered to stay with the miner until they returned, but Jerry advised against it, as the hut was on a lonely road.

It did not take long to reach Cresville. Dr. Morrison was routed out of bed by the boys, and agreed to return with them in the auto, when the case had been explained to him.

"Just wait until I get dressed," he said, "and pack up some instruments and I'll be with you."

While waiting, Jerry examined the auto to see that there was plenty of water and gasolene in the tanks. He found everything all right.

While Dr. Morrison was making ready to relieve the sufferings of the miner in the hut, Jack Pender, on his motor-cycle, was still speeding on, to get as far away as possible from those in pursuit of him. When he turned from the road and cut across lots he thought very likely that the auto

would not follow. But he was taking no chances, and, when he emerged into the highway again, about a mile farther on, he still ran his machine at full speed.

"That was a close call!" he exclaimed. "Who would ever have thought that those boys, the same ones who made all the trouble for Noddy, would be after me! I escaped just in time. I hope I didn't kill the old man, though it was a hard blow I struck him!"

Pender slowed down his machine and listened. No sound of pursuit came to him on the quiet night air. He stopped alongside of the road, under a big oak tree.

"Guess I'll light up and see how I made out," he said to himself. He lighted his acetylene lamp and, standing in the glare of it, drew from his pocket the belt he had stolen from the old miner.

"Feels heavy," he muttered. "Ought to be plenty of gold in it. Well, I need the money if I am to join Noddy. I must read his letter again."

He pulled out a sheet of paper and began glancing over it.

"Dated New York," he said. "He says he's having lots of fun and no end of larks with Bill Berry. I don't care much for Bill, myself. He never was any good around town, and he's a desperate man. Hum! let's see!" He turned to the letter again. "'Come and join me, Jack. We'll

go West and have a good time. Bring some money.' Well, I've got the money, all right. Now to start West. I'll ride the motor as far as the depot and take a train."

Replacing the letter and the belt of gold in his pockets, Pender remounted his machine and started off down the road, dark shadows from the trees soon hiding him.

It was just about this time that Dr. Morrison had completed his preparations to visit the injured miner. The physician took a seat in the auto beside Bob, Ned and Jerry being in front, the latter steering.

"Now, don't go too fast," cautioned the doctor to Jerry. "You know I'm an old-fashioned man, and not used to making professional visits any faster than my horse, old Dobbins, can take me. I don't want an upset."

Jerry promised to be cautious. The moon had begun to go down, and it was no easy task steering along the shadowy road, but the boy managed it, and soon the deserted hut was reached.

"Now to see what sort of a case I have," spoke the doctor.

"I'll bring one of the oil lamps," said Jerry, unfastening a lantern from the dashboard, after stopping the automobile engine. "You can see to work by it."

The boys and Dr. Morrison entered the hut.

Jerry held the lamp up high to illuminate the place.

"Now I'm ready," announced the physician. "Where is the patient?" and he opened his medical case.

In wonderment the boys gazed around the hut. To their astonishment, there was not the slightest sign of the wounded miner. He had disappeared!

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MINER.

"He's gone!" exclaimed Ned.

"Are you sure he was here?" inquired the physician.

Of that the boys had not the slightest doubt, and they speedily convinced the medical man. The lantern was flashed in every corner of the hut, but there was not a sign of the miner.

"It's rather queer," commented Dr. Morrison, when he had listened to the details the boys gave him.

"Do you suppose some one came and carried him off?" asked Bob.

"More likely he was not as badly hurt as you supposed," replied Dr. Morrison. "He may have been only stunned by a blow on the head. When he regained his senses he probably feared another attack, and so he hurried from the hut. Let me take the lamp."

The physician flashed the lantern outside the door of the cabin, holding it close to the ground.

"I thought so," he said. "See, there are a few

grains of the gold-dust showing on the door sill, and here are more, farther along the path. The man has gone away, and has left a little golden trail."

The physician attempted to follow it, but the yellow specks soon disappeared and there was no other clew.

"Depend on it, he has run away in fear," said the doctor. "Rather disappointing, too. I believe he could tell a queer story. Who robbed him, I wonder?"

"It was——" began Bob, but a nudge from Jerry stopped him.

"We saw some one run from the hut," explained Jerry. "We gave chase in the automobile, but the fellow cut across lots and we couldn't follow."

"I suppose I may as well go back," announced the doctor. "There is no use staying here. I don't believe the miner will return and solve the mystery for us."

The auto was turned toward Cresville and a quick trip was made, the boys speculating among themselves on what might be revealed if the wounded man could be found.

The physician was left at his home, and then the boys began thinking of their beds, as it was growing late.

"Queer that both Noddy and Jack should turn thieves, isn't it?" remarked Jerry.

"And that we should happen to be mixed up in both cases," put in Ned. "I wonder if we will meet either of them again."

If the boys could have looked into the future they would have seen that they were destined to soon encounter Noddy and Jack, and under the strangest of circumstances.

The auto was put away and three tired boys were soon snoring in their beds. They were up bright and early the next morning and in consultation about the proposed trip to Chicago. They called on Mr. Wakefield to learn his plans.

He said he expected to start for the Windy City by way of New York, on Thursday. It was then Tuesday, and the boys realized that they had little time to spare in which to make their preparations.

The three parents, who had somewhat reluctantly given their consent to the project, were soon almost as enthusiastic as the boys. Stocks of clothing were looked over, money matters were arranged, and the boys packed their dress-suit cases with what they thought would do them on the trip. They were each given a fairly liberal allowance of funds.

Then the automobile was got ready. It was given a thorough overhauling, and an extra supply of tools, together with a full new set of tires, was provided. Andy Rush was told to prepare to go,

it having been decided to take him as far as New York or Chicago, he having relatives in both cities.

At last the time came to start. It was a fine, crisp September morning, and the boys were up early enough to see the sun rise. The suit-cases had been strapped to the machine, tires were pumped up, there was plenty of water and gasolene in the tanks, the batteries were renewed, and every bit of machinery had been gone over carefully. Andy Rush, the night previous, had sent his things over to Bob's house, from whence the trip was to be begun. Andy himself arrived right after breakfast.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "Here we go—all aboard—blow the horn—get out of the way—turn on the gasolene—off brakes—break the records—mile a minute—whoop!"

"You'll have all the excitement you want for once, I hope, Andy," said Jerry.

"Betcherlife!" exclaimed Andy, in one breath.

The boys piled into the auto; good-byes were called, over and over again. Then came a toot of a horn as Mr. Wakefield came up the road in his machine, a friend, who intended making the trip, accompanying him.

"All ready, boys?" he called.

"All ready!" replied Jerry, who was going to steer for the first stage.

With a blaring of the automobile trumpets, a

waving of hands from those who had gathered to see the start, and a chorus of cries, wishing every one good luck, the little party rode away.

Mr. Wakefield, who knew the road better than did the boys, took the lead. His car was of the same pattern as theirs and both machines were of equal speed. For several miles the two autos puffed along over the pleasant country roads.

No attempt to make time was tried, and at noon the travelers found themselves in Providence, Rhode Island, that being the first stopping place Mr. Wakefield had decided on. The machines were run up in front of a quiet but good hotel, and every one was hungry enough to do full justice to the meal.

"How do you boys like it?" asked Mr. Wakefield at the table. "Do you think you can stand it as far as Chicago?"

They were all sure they could run the machine to San Francisco, if necessary, and Mr. Wakefield and his friend laughed at their enthusiasm.

"We have come about seventy miles without a mishap," said Mr. Wakefield, "but there are many miles ahead of us yet."

After a short rest the journey was again taken up, and throughout the afternoon the autos were speeded along. The way was through a pleasant country, and the boys enjoyed the scenery and fresh air. Several times they stopped at farm-

houses to get drinks of cold milk, and once a motherly-looking woman filled the boys' pockets with newly baked doughnuts that were delicious.

"We'll spend the night in Norwich, Conn.," said Mr. Wakefield, when the two autos were ready to start, after a momentary stop at a farmhouse.

"Norwich—Norwich! I know Norwich!" exclaimed Andy. "I saw it in a book once—years ago—I was a little fellow—man in the moon came down too soon to inquire the way to Norwich—went by the south—burnt his mouth—eating cold bean porridge!"

"You remember your nursery rhymes well," said Mr. Wakefield, with a laugh, in which all joined.

On and on chugged the autos. The afternoon waned to dusk and frequent signboards told that the distance from Norwich was constantly lessening. Mr. Wakefield was about half a mile in advance, on a straight, level road. Suddenly came a sound as of a pistol shot.

"Tire busted!" exclaimed Jerry, shutting off the power. Mr. Wakefield heard the noise and turned back.

"Accident?" he inquired.

Jerry explained that one of their inner tubes had blown out.

"Want any help?" asked the athletic instructor.

"We may as well begin now as any other time to mend our own breaks," spoke Jerry. "You go ahead. We'll catch up to you soon."

"All right," said Mr. Wakefield. He felt that it would be a good thing to accustom the boys to depend on themselves. So, telling them that the road to Norwich was now a straight one, and that the town was about ten miles off, he left them to their own devices.

The boys started in on the not very easy task of taking off the heavy outer shoe and inserting a new inner tube, of which they carried a supply. It finally became so dark that they had to light the lamps to see to work. At length they were finished and the tools were put away.

The new tire was pumped up and the engine started. The boys took their seats, and, at Bob's request, he was allowed to steer.

"Go slow at first," advised Jerry, "until we see how the new tube holds."

Bob started off at first speed. It was now quite dark, but the oil and acetylene lamps gave a good light. All at once Bob, who was peering ahead, shut off the power with a jerk and put the brakes on hard.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry.

"Something in the road," replied the steersman, pointing to a dark object.

The next instant three figures loomed up in the glare of the auto lamps.

"Climb out of that gasolene gig!" exclaimed a rough voice. "We're hard up an' we need help!"

CHAPTER VI.

A HOLD-UP.

"WHO are you?" asked Jerry, boldly.

"Never mind who we are!" exclaimed the same voice. "Just git out of that choo-choo wagon an' hand over what spare change you have."

"Is this a hold-up?" demanded Ned.

"If it isn't it's a good imitation of one," was the answer, accompanied by a laugh. "Come, now! Look lively!"

One of the men came around to the side of the auto and grabbed Bob by the arm. At the same time another of the tramp trio attempted to seize Jerry. Ned was in the rear seat.

"Let go of me!" exclaimed Jerry, striking at the man who had climbed up on the step of the machine. The boy's blow fell on the man's arm.

"Oh, that's your game, is it?" cried the ruffian. He drew back his fist as though to fell Jerry.

"Help! help!" yelled Bob. He was being pulled from the car by the tramp who had grabbed him. It looked bad for the Motor Boys.

Ned sprang up from the rear. He had been

"TAKE THAT!" NED CRIED.—*Page* 43.

fumbling in a valise on the floor of the tonneau. He leaned forward over the front seat. In each hand he held some object, bright and shining, and he aimed them full in the faces of the two tramps on either side of the auto.

"Take that!" Ned cried.

There was a sharp, hissing sound, a click, and the air was filled with a pungent odor.

"I'm killed! He's blinded me!" yelled the tramp, who had grabbed Bob.

"Oh! oh! My head is blown off!" yelled the other ruffian.

Both of them toppled from the steps of the auto and rolled over and over in the road, screaming with pain and fright.

"And there's one for you!" shouted Ned, taking aim at the tramp in front of the machine, and once more the hissing sound was heard.

"Wow!" cried the fellow, and, whirling around, he dashed off, full speed, down the road.

"Bully for you! Hit 'em again—knock 'em out—smash—bang—never say die—hear 'em yell—do it again—siss—boom—ah! Whoop!" cried Andy, standing on the seat and waving his cap.

The two tramps who had fallen to the road got up, and, still yelling in pain, followed their companion.

"Start off!" exclaimed Ned to Bob. "I guess they won't bother us again very soon."

"What in the world did you do to them?" asked Jerry.

"Used an ammonia squirt-gun on each one," said Ned.

He showed the boys two affairs that looked like small revolvers, only the ammunition was liquid spirits of ammonia, quite strong, contained in a rubber bulb in the handle. By pressing the bulb a fine stream of ammonia could be shot for quite a distance.

"I saw 'em advertised in a magazine," said Ned. "They were just the things for vicious dogs and men, it said, for they blind a person temporarily and make his face smart like sixty, but no permanent injury is done. I had 'em in my valise and I just happened to think of them when those chaps held us up."

"Lucky you did," commented Jerry. "I thought we were surely going to be robbed."

"I guess they thought they were killed when they felt that ammonia," said Bob. "Ned, you're all right, that's what you are!" he finished, heartily.

"I guess we'd better move along, or Mr. Wakefield may be worried about us," suggested Jerry.

So Bob threw the gear into place and the machine moved away. No further sign of the tramps was seen, and the boys reached Norwich without further incident. They found the hotel Mr. Wake-

field had arranged to meet them at, and soon were eating a good supper. The adventure with the tramps was related, and Mr. Wakefield congratulated the boys on their pluck.

An early start was had next morning and good progress was made, so that by noon the travelers were in Waterbury, Conn., where dinner was eaten. Mr. Wakefield said that by swift traveling New York could be reached late that night, but he did not advise it. Instead, the night was spent in Danbury.

By noon the next day more than half the distance between their last stopping place and New York had been covered, and late that afternoon found the two autos speeding down Riverside Drive, leading to the metropolis. Not an accident had occurred since the hold-up by the tramps and the blowing out of the tire on the boys' auto, and each one was congratulating himself that the trip was being made under the best of luck.

The travelers were about opposite Grant's tomb, and were moving along slowly, when suddenly, with a noise like a shot, one of Mr. Wakefield's tires burst. A young woman, driving a spirited horse, was passing his auto at the time, and the animal, taking fright, took the bit in his teeth and bolted.

The young woman screamed in fright, lost her hold on the reins and clung desperately to the seat.

There were no vehicles on the drive in that vicinity just then, excepting the two autos and the runaway.

"Quick!" cried Mr. Wakefield to the boys, as he brought his machine to a stop. "Take after her! There may be an accident! I can't go on until I mend this break!"

Ned was steering, and made a turn. Like a flash he threw on the third gear and the auto sprang forward like an unleashed hound. Bob, Andy and Jerry clung to the seats, while Ned steered the machine after the runaway horse.

The animal was now galloping at top speed, but the auto was creeping up on him. It made scarcely a sound, only a purring as the cylinders exploded, one after another.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jerry. "Go close enough so one of us can jump in the carriage?"

"Watch!" was all Ned replied.

Faster and faster went the auto. At length it passed the galloping steed, and the boys could see the young woman clinging in desperation to the seat. Then, as Ned steered the machine ahead of the horse, the boys saw what his plan was.

The animal was now directly behind the auto, coming on like the wind. Ned gave one glance back. Then he quickly threw the gears to first speed. So quickly was it done that the horse nearly

rammed his nose into the rear of the tonneau. The animal did not think of dashing to one side and so passing the car. Instead he kept his place behind it.

Then Ned shut off the power and allowed the machine to drift along. The horse, seeing the obstruction continually in front of him, gradually reduced his speed, and finally, when the auto came to a stop, the animal did likewise.

Jerry jumped from his seat and, running back, grasped the bridle. He spoke soothingly to the animal, and soon had him quieted. The young woman, pale and trembling, regained her composure.

"I'm so much obliged to you," she said. "Really, I don't know what possessed Dexter. He never was frightened at autos before. I'm a little ashamed of myself, too. I ought to have kept hold of the reins and I could have managed him."

"Are you sure you will be all right now?" asked Jerry. "If not, one of us will go with you."

"Oh, I can take care of him now," replied the lady. "Dexter will be all right. I thank you boys very much," she added, sweetly, and a moment later drove off.

The boys turned the auto around and speeded back to where they had left Mr. Wakefield. He had repaired the break in the tire in the meanwhile and was ready to proceed.

In a short time the travelers steered for the hotel, uptown, where Mr. Wakefield had engaged rooms for all. The machines were sent to a garage, and the boys prepared to wash up for supper. It was getting quite dark, and the electric lights in the streets were gleaming. Jerry was looking from the window of the sitting-room of the suite which the boys had on the third floor.

Suddenly he gave a start and cried:

"There he goes!"

"Who?" asked Ned.

"Noddy Nixon!" replied Jerry, dashing from the room.

CHAPTER VII.

A FRUITLESS PURSUIT.

For a few seconds the other boys did not know whether Jerry was joking or in earnest. But when he did not return in a little while they knew he must have meant what he said.

"I don't see anything of Noddy," spoke Ned, looking out of the window whence Jerry had spied their enemy.

"It's getting too dark to see anything," said Bob.

"Well, I guess if Jerry said he saw Noddy he meant it," put in Andy. "I hope he catches him and gives him a good thrashing!"

"Well, boys," exclaimed Mr. Wakefield at that instant, entering their room, "are you all ready for supper?"

"We are," answered Ned.

"Where is Jerry?" asked the athletic instructor, looking around.

"He went out for a little while," replied Ned, quickly, not wishing to state Jerry's real errand. "I guess he'll be back in a short time."

"He doesn't know his way around New York;

I hope he will not get lost," spoke Mr. Wakefield.

"Trust Jerry to find his way back," said Ned.

Then the party went down to supper without waiting for the missing member. Meanwhile, Jerry was in hot pursuit of Noddy.

"I wonder what he is doing in New York?" thought Jerry, as he jumped into an elevator that was just going down, and got out on the ground floor.

The boy ran out into the street and glanced in the direction he had seen Noddy taking. The thoroughfare was not crowded, and, though it was getting quite dark, Jerry caught a glimpse of Noddy's back.

"I'll catch him and ask him what he meant about that note he wrote, threatening to get even with us," he thought, as he hurried on.

Noddy had quite a start, and Jerry had some difficulty in getting close to him. He lost a little time at a street crossing, where there were a number of vehicles, and Noddy got farther ahead. Jerry broke into a run when he saw a passage, and hurried on.

Noddy happened to glance back just as Jerry passed beneath an electric light, and seeing he was pursued, started forward at a rapid rate.

The pursuit was getting hot. They had passed from a busy part of the city and were on a street

containing only old buildings. There were less people, too, and Jerry had a good view of Noddy.

Suddenly Noddy turned, shook his fist, and disappeared into a dilapidated tenement house, which he was in front of at the time. With a cry, Jerry bounded forward. As he entered the hallway he bumped into a roughly dressed man, as he could see by the dim light of a lamp suspended at the rear end of the passage.

"Now, then, wot's all this rush about?" demanded the man.

"I beg your pardon," said Jerry, halting.

"Be you the doctor?" asked the man.

"The doctor? No. Why?"

" 'Cause he's took bad, an' we've sent fer the doctor. I t'ought you was him."

"Who's sick?" inquired the boy, forgetting for the moment what had brought him to the place.

"He's an old miner. I don't know him, but he come to me, sick an' dead broke, an' I let him sleep in my room. He's off his trolley, I guess, but he says his name is Jim Nestor."

"Jim Nestor!" exclaimed Jerry. He remembered that was the name of the miner in the hut, whom Pender had robbed.

"That's the name he gave."

"Off his trolley?" went on the youth, wondering what form of disease that was.

"Yep. Nutty, you know; bug-house, wheels, crazy, if that suits you better."

"Oh!" replied Jerry, understanding.

"If you ain't the doc. no use of me wastin' my time on you," the man went on. "I'll have to chase out after one."

"I saw the sign of a doctor's office a little way back on this street as I came along," volunteered the boy. "I'll go and stay with the man while you run there."

"Bully for you!" said the man. "Some of the people in this house is afraid of him 'cause he talks in his sleep. You'll find him on the second floor front."

Jerry went up. In a dimly lighted room he saw an old man lying on a bed, covered with ragged quilts. One glance showed Jerry that the man was the miner who had mysteriously disappeared from the hut when they sought to aid him.

Suddenly the sick man opened his eyes. He looked sharply at Jerry and exclaimed:

"Oh, you've come back, have you? Where is the boy who took my gold?"

"He got away," explained Jerry, realizing that the sick man was in his right senses, for a time at least.

"I remember you," went on the miner. "You and some other boys helped me after I was struck. You left me alone in the cabin. I was afraid the

one who took my gold would come back, so I crawled out. The air made me feel better. I walked to the railroad, got on a freight train, and came here. Then I got sick again.

"Gold! gold! gold!" exclaimed the miner, suddenly. "I see it all around. Millions and millions of it! There is gold for all of us! Do not rob me!"

Jerry knew the man was wandering again. Just then the doctor came in and Jerry, after promising to come back, hurried around to the hotel, where he found his friends worried over his absence. He explained about his chase and the finding of the mysterious miner.

"Did you catch Noddy?" asked Andy.

"I forgot all about him when I saw Nestor," replied Jerry. "I guess Noddy got away, all right, probably out of a back door."

"What are you going to do about the miner?" asked Mr. Wakefield, after supper.

"I'd like to befriend him if we could," said Jerry. "He seems like an honest man."

"I'll go around and see him," remarked the athletic instructor. "Perhaps we can arrange to do something for him."

It was quite late that night when Mr. Wakefield returned from his visit to Jim Nestor. He found the boys up waiting for him.

"It's a queer story," said Mr. Wakefield. "Part

of it I want you to hear for yourselves from him, part I will tell you. It seems that James Nestor, which is his name, found quite a rich claim out in Arizona. He staked it out and, with some of the gold in his possession, came East to see if he could find a former partner he wanted to share in his good luck.

"He reached Cresville and there he was taken sick. He went to the old hut, where you found him, and there, while he was helpless, some one, whom you boys know to be Jack Pender, came along and robbed him.

"Nestor made his way to New York, after his mysterious disappearance from the hut, and he found poor but faithful friends in the tenement house."

"What part of the story do you want him to tell us himself?" asked Ned.

"About his claim—his gold mine," said Mr. Wakefield. "I would rather you get that from him direct."

"Is he very sick?" asked Jerry.

"The doctor thinks he will be around in a few days."

"And what do you propose?" asked Bob, who could see that Mr. Wakefield had something on his mind.

"I think if you boys are going to make a western trip you cannot do better than take this miner

along with you," answered the gentleman. "I talked to him about it, after the doctor had given him some quieting medicine, and he said he would be glad of a chance to get out West."

"Shall we wait here until he gets well?" asked Jerry.

"My plan would be for you boys to make up his fare to Chicago," said Mr. Wakefield, "and let him join you there, say in a week. You can go by auto and he can go by train."

This plan met with the approval of the three chums. They made up a purse for Jim Nestor and arranged for Mr. Wakefield to take it to the miner. The latter did so, and planned for the miner to come on to Chicago when he was well and strong.

"The boys will put up at the Grand Hotel," said Mr. Wakefield, passing over the money, which was to be Nestor's fare to Chicago.

"And I'll meet 'em there an' put 'em up against the greatest proposition they ever heard of," promised the miner.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE WINDY CITY.

FIVE days later the automobile travelers were in Chicago. No serious accidents had occurred on the road, and they finished the first part of their trip in good shape. All the boys thought of was whether they would be allowed to proceed farther West.

Andy Rush was obliged to leave them, for he had promised to visit a relative of his mother. He did not relish being separated from his chums.

"Tough!" he exclaimed. "Wish I could go along—bully fun—shoot Indians—lasso the cowboys—kill the buffalos—ride a wild bull—break a bucking mustang—chase over the prairies—lots of sport—whoop!

"We'd like to have you come," said Jerry, "but your folks said you could go no farther, and we have agreed to leave you here and take Mr. Nestor. So we have to keep our word."

Andy agreed that this was right, but the galvanic youth certainly did hate to part from his friends. The three chums put up at the Grand Hotel, and

Mr. Wakefield, after some parting words of advice, left them, as he had some business to transact. He said he did not expect to see them again before he returned to Cresville, and wished them all sorts of good luck.

"What's the first thing to do?" asked Bob, when the boys found themselves alone in their hotel rooms.

"Wire home that we are safe and ask if we can go farther West," suggested Jerry. "But don't say anything about the miner. He may not show up, and they'll laugh at us if they find that we have been fooled."

The wires were soon busy with messages from each of the three boys.

A day of anxious waiting ensued. Then, on the second afternoon the bellboy brought three yellow envelopes to their rooms. With trembling fingers the boys tore the missives open.

"Hurrah! I can go!" cried Jerry.

"So can I!" exclaimed Ned.

"Me, too!" put in Bob.

The boys executed an impromptu war-dance in their delight.

"Ho for the West and the gold mines!" cried Ned, trying to hug Jerry and Chunky at the same time and finding it was too much of a contract.

There came a knock on the door.

"I guess that's some one to tell us to stop our noise," remarked Jerry. "I thought you chaps were cutting up too rough."

"As if he didn't make as much of the row as any of us!" exclaimed Ned.

Bob opened the door. A well-dressed man, with iron-gray moustache and hair, entered.

"Here I be!" he announced, "an' I see you boys are right on deck!"

"I guess you've made a mistake," said Jerry, gently.

"Ain't this the Grand Hotel, where I was to meet the boys that befriended old Jim Nestor?" the man asked.

Then the boys saw it was their friend, the miner. But he had so changed in appearance, with a new suit of clothes, and with his hair and whiskers trimmed, that they did not recognize him. They greeted him heartily.

"I got well quicker than I expected," went on Nestor, "an' I couldn't stand New York any longer. Mr. Wakefield left me a tidy sum. He grub-staked me, so to speak, an' I come West. Got a quick train an' made Chicago 'most as soon as you boys did in your auto wagon."

"We're glad to see you," remarked Jerry.

"No more than I am to see you," put in the miner. "Now let's git right down to business.

That's my way. No beatin' around the bush for Jim Nestor.

"I told your friend, Mr. Wakefield, that I'd put you boys up against a good big proposition. Now I'm goin' to do it. Can you go as far as Arizona in that wagon of yours?"

"Farther if need be," replied Ned.

"Good! Now will your folks let you go?"

For answer the boys held out their telegrams.

"Good, again I see it's all right. Now I want you boys to know I ain't so poor as I looked to be when you found me. I'm rich, that's what I am, only I can't git at my money.

"The long and short of it is that I discovered down in the southern part of Arizona a rich gold mine. It assays high. In fact, if you saw the gold I had in the hut, you saw some of the yellow stuff that came from my mine. It's a lost mine."

"A lost mine?" exclaimed Bob, blankly. "Then what good is it?"

"It was lost, but I found it again," explained Nestor. "There's millions in it. It's up in the mountains, about a hundred miles from Tucson. The gold is there, but it's hard to reach.

"Now what I want to know is, can you boys go there, or near there, in your choo-choo cart? If you can, and we are successful, there's a chance for us all to make our fortunes, for I'll give you boys

a share apiece for what you did for me when I was in trouble."

"I guess we can go," said Jerry.

"It'll be a hard trip, full of trouble an' some danger," warned the miner.

"We'll risk it," said Ned.

"When can you start?" asked Nestor.

"Let's go right now!" exclaimed Bob, with such earnestness that the other laughed.

"To-morrow or next day will do," said Nestor. "I have a few things to attend to. I'll meet you here, say day after to-morrow."

At the agreed time Nestor was on hand. In the meantime the auto had been thoroughly overhauled, put in shape for a long, hard trip, and extra supplies purchased. It was a bright, sunny day when the start from Chicago was made.

"Let her go!" exclaimed Nestor, as he climbed into the rear seat with Bob.

Jerry, who was steering, threw in the gear clutches and the machine moved off on its long and what was destined to be eventful trip.

"Hold on!" cried Nestor, suddenly.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry, stopping the car.

"Have you boys got guns?"

"Guns?" repeated Jerry, somewhat in bewilderment.

"Well, revolvers, then," went on the miner.

In answer, Ned rather sheepishly took from his valise three new double-action revolvers of excellent make.

"I thought we might need 'em," he said, "but I was afraid you'd laugh at me and say it was foolish."

"It's all right!" exclaimed Nestor. "I was going to tell you to git some. You see, you don't always need a gun in Arizona, but when you do, as the man in the story said about Texas, you need it mighty bad an' mighty sudden. So it's a prime thing you have 'em. I've got mine," and he showed two big .45 calibre ones.

Well armed, as well as otherwise provided for, the little expedition started off again, the automobile wending in and out through the busy Chicago streets.

"We'll make as straight a course as we can for Tucson," said Nestor. "I know the roads pretty well, 'cause I traveled 'em in a stage years ago, when Chicago was only a village."

The machine was puffing along at a fair rate of speed and had almost reached the outskirts of the city when a policeman, mounted on a motor-cycle, dashed up.

"I'll have to take you in," he announced.

"What for?" asked Ned.

"Riding too fast in the city limits."

"But we were going slow," objected Jerry. "If

you know anything about automobiles you can see the lever is only on the first-speed notch, and that only goes ten miles an hour at best."

"Can't help it," replied the officer. "I timed you and you went too fast."

"Dog-gone his hide, let me git my gun out an' I'll show him who he's a-holdin' up!" exclaimed Nestor, in a whisper.

"No, no!" expostulated Ned, who overheard the miner's threat. "This isn't out West. Don't pull any guns!"

"Well," put in Jerry, speaking to the officer, "if you think we were violating the law I suppose we'll have to go back with you. Shall I turn around and accompany you?" he asked, politely.

"That's what you better do. I don't want no fuss, but if you want trouble I'll make it for you."

The other boys wondered at Jerry's easy compliance with what they knew was an unreasonable and unjust command. The steersman started the machine slowly ahead, and, as the road was wide, began to turn in a circle, to head back to Chicago.

But when the auto was half way around, and pointed in the direction of the Windy City, Jerry did not continue on the way the officer expected. Instead, the boy widened his circle, made a complete revolution and then, throwing in the second speed, dashed away down the road, leaving the

discomfited motor-policeman to rage over the trick that had been played on him.

"I wasn't going to submit to arrest when I knew we were not guilty," said Jerry.

In a little while Chicago was left behind, and the auto dashed along a pleasant country road and was making good time toward the West.

Suddenly there came a puffing from behind that told of another machine coming. It passed the boys, who had slowed down a bit, and as it went by the occupants of the Cresville machine had a good view of those in the other car.

"Did you see them?" cried Jerry, in amazement.

"Who?" asked Bob, who had not given much heed to the other auto.

"Noddy Nixon was in that machine, and with him were Jack Pender and Bill Berry!"

CHAPTER IX.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

As Jerry spoke, the other boys looked and saw Noddy turn to stare at them. The bully rose in his seat and shook his fist at the Motor Boys, while the wind bore back some indistinguishable words he shouted.

"Let's take after him!" cried Ned.

"What would be the use?" asked Jerry. "We don't want trouble if we can avoid it. The farther off those fellows are the better we'll be."

The boys explained to Nestor something about the character of Noddy, Berry, and Pender, the miner listening, gravely.

"Well, on the whole," he remarked, "it's better to have an enemy in front of you than at your back. I guess we can make out to beat 'em at whatever game they play. But I'd like to catch the chap as took my gold."

Jerry started his machine up again, but made no effort to catch up with Noddy, who was now far in advance. The Cresville auto bowled along, and

at noon a stop was made in a small village, where dinner was eaten.

They traveled along all the afternoon. Toward dusk they struck a lonely stretch of country, and inquiry at a log cabin brought out that the nearest town was ten miles ahead.

"We must push for it," said Nestor; "that is, if we intend to sleep in beds to-night."

Ned was steering, the boys having agreed to take turn and turn about. It became quite dark, and the auto was shooting along at reduced speed, for, even with the gas and oil lamps, the road was dim.

Suddenly a shot rang out in the darkness. It was followed by a louder report as one of the auto tires burst, punctured by a bullet. The car careened to one side and bumped along on the flattened rubber.

"They're shooting at us!" cried Nestor. "Two can play at that game!"

He whipped out his revolver and fired three shots straight ahead, the flashes cutting the darkness.

"They're behind, not ahead!" yelled Jerry, who was in the rear seat with the miner. "It was one of the back tires that burst!"

Ned had shut off power and the auto came to a halt. The boys got out, and Jerry took off one of the oil lamps to see what damage had been done.

A new inner tube would be needed, and it would be hard work inserting it in the dark.

"That's some of Noddy's or Pender's work," observed Ned. "They must be following us, and yet they started off ahead."

"There are so many roads around here that they could go off to one side, wait, and then come up behind us," said Nestor. "But what's to be done?"

"We can't go ahead until we fix the tire," said Jerry.

"Don't try to do it in the dark," advised the miner. "Tell you what to do. I'll camp here with the machine, for I'm used to sleeping outdoors nights. It's only about two miles into town now, and you boys can walk it. In the morning you can come back and fix things up."

"What will you do for supper?" asked Jerry.

"Don't you worry about that," replied the miner. "I've got a couple of sandwiches in my pocket. I got 'em at the place we had dinner, 'cause I always like to travel with a little grub about me. They'll do until morning."

So it was arranged. The lights on the auto were put out and Nestor curled up in the tonneau, with some lap-robes over him. The boys started afoot for the town, promising to come back as soon as it was light enough to see to put the new tube in the tire.

"I wonder what Noddy's game is?" asked Ned

of his companions. "And how did he and Pender come together?"

"There's no telling what those two may do," said Jerry. "I'm afraid we're in for trouble."

They were to meet it sooner than they expected. About this time, a mile from where the crippled auto was stalled, two figures were sneaking along the road.

"Are you sure you hit the tire, Bill?" asked a voice, which, if the Motor Boys had heard, they would have recognized at once as Noddy Nixon's.

"Course I winged 'em," replied Bill Berry. "It was easy. All I had to do was to jump out from behind the bushes where we were hid and pop at 'em. I could hear the tire bust."

"I wonder if it made 'em lay up for repairs?"

"It sure did. I heard 'em shut off the power. Now we'll hustle back to our car and continue the trip."

"I'll teach those Cresville cubs to come meddling after me," spoke Noddy. "I'll follow 'em close and make all the trouble I can. As you say, we may as well start off again. I hope Pender isn't tired waiting alone for us in the car. How far ahead is it now?"

"Half a mile, I guess."

As the Motor Boys knew, Noddy had made for New York after running away from home with Bill

Berry. He wrote to the boys and to Pender from there, and later Pender joined the rascally pair.

Noddy was preparing for a trip with his companions, and was just about to start when Jerry spied him from the hotel window. He escaped through the tenement house and at once got ready to leave New York in a hurry.

It was by the merest chance that he passed the Cresville auto on leaving Chicago, and at once had formed the plan of annoying the three chums.

As Nestor had said, Noddy and his companions had taken a side road, allowed the Cresville auto to get ahead and then, at Berry's suggestion, had ambushed themselves to try and do some damage as the Motor Boys passed. The chief conspirators were now on their way to where they had left their auto.

They reached it, found Pender half asleep, curled up on a seat, and started slowly off in the darkness.

By keeping to the diverging road they were on, they passed around the disabled machine, and came out into the main highway again, ahead of the three boys who were tramping toward the town.

Noddy was steering, and with a reckless disregard of the dangers of the road was going very fast. Suddenly there was a crash and the auto stopped.

"You've gone an' done it now!" exclaimed Bill.

"What if I have?" snapped Noddy. "It's my machine, ain't it?"

"An' it's my neck you're tryin' to break," replied Bill. "What's the trouble, anyhow?"

Noddy got out to look. Something had gone wrong with the sliding gear and he had to crawl under the machine to fix it, while Pender held a light. Bill obstinately refused to lend a hand, as he said it was all Noddy's fault.

"I'm goin' to walk on to the next town," declared Berry. "You can stop an' pick me up on your way through. I'll be at the hotel."

He went off in the darkness, while Noddy and Jack continued to work at the auto. It took more than half an hour to fix the break, but at last the machine was ready to start. Noddy was about to crank it up when he heard the sound of some persons coming along the road, voices mingling with the footsteps.

He looked up, and was much surprised to see, in the glare of the lamps, Jerry, Bob and Ned.

"Oh!" said Noddy, faintly, for he did not know what else to say.

On their part the Motor Boys were as much startled as was Noddy at the unexpected meeting.

"So you're here, are you?" asked Jerry.

"Can't you see without having to be told?" inquired Noddy, with a surly growl. "Now you've

seen us, you'd better go on and mind your own business."

"I guess this is a free country, and we have as much right on this road as you have," spoke Ned.

"You haven't any right to follow me all the while!" burst out the former bully of Cresville.

"We wouldn't be following you if you hadn't fired at us and punctured the tire!" cried Bob.

"Who says I fired a shot?" demanded Noddy.

"I do!" exclaimed Ned.

"You don't know what you're talking about!" exclaimed the bully. "If you say another word I'll lick you!"

He was mad clear through, and made a rush at Ned. Jerry sprang forward and met Noddy with a blow straight from the shoulder. The bully went down. He got up quickly, and the two boys went at each other, "hammer and tongs." Jerry kept his head and landed twice, heavily, on Noddy. The latter gave Jerry a bad blow on the right eye, but the latter retaliated by making Noddy's nose bleed.

As Noddy felt the warm blood trickling down his face he became frightened.

"Help! help!" he cried. "Why don't you help me, Jack?"

Pender had discreetly remained in the car. At this he jumped out. Ned was ready, however, and stepped in front of him. Jack aimed a blow at Ned. The latter dodged it and sent a straight left

for Pender's head. It caught him on the jaw and he went down heavily.

By this time Noddy had broken away from Jerry and ran toward the auto. Jerry was satisfied with the punishment he had inflicted and did not follow. Noddy quickly cranked up his machine and leaped to the steering seat.

"Come on, Jack!" he cried.

Pender wiggled from the grip in which Ned held him, jumped into the car beside the bully and the next instant the two enemies of the Motor Boys were chugging off down the road.

CHAPTER X.

ENCIRCLED BY COWBOYS.

FOR a few moments the three chums stood staring at the vanishing auto. Then Jerry, with a grunt, felt of his damaged eye.

"I guess I don't owe Noddy anything," he remarked, drily.

"I paid off some old scores to Pender," said Ned, with a grin..

"Wish I'd got a chance at one of them!" observed Bob.

"You're just as well off, Chunky," spoke Jerry. "We may as well keep on to town, now the excitement is over.. It's getting late, and I'm hungry."

In about half an hour they were in the village, where they found a good hotel. They caught no sight of Noddy and his companions.

The next morning the boys made a hasty breakfast and hired a man to drive them out to their stranded auto. They found Nestor just awakening from what he declared had been a refreshing sleep. The punctured tire was soon repaired, and, dismissing the driver of the wagon, the boys and the miner

sped to town in the machine. They put up at the hotel, where Nestor made a good breakfast.

As a few supplies were needed for the auto, it was decided to lay over for a day in the town. Jerry attended to the purchases, while Nestor and the other boys took things easy in the room they had hired at the hotel.

"I'm sure glad I met you, boys," said the old miner, stretching out in a comfortable chair. "I'm jest countin' the days 'till we git out to the gold mine."

"Will it take long now?" asked Ned.

"We ought to reach Tucson in about two weeks now. Of course it's going to be a little hard gittin' over the New Mexico mountain range, but I guess the choo-choo wagon will do it. We may have a little trouble findin' the mine, too."

"I thought you said you had it all staked out," observed Chunky.

"So I have," answered Nestor. "But you see it's in a part of the mountains not very well traveled. I've lost my way more than once there. But I reckon I can find the mine. Once I strike the trail leadin' out of Dead Horse Gulch I'm all right. The mine isn't far from there."

If the miner could have looked into the next room he would not have talked so freely concerning the mine. For, in the adjoining apartment was Bill Berry. He listened intently to what Nestor

said, and soon was able to tell, from the conversation, who the occupants in the room next to him were.

"A gold mine, eh?" said Bill, softly. "I reckon Noddy and I will get in on that deal. We must profit by this. I wish Noddy would hurry up. We must follow those young cubs."

Bill, in a measure, was stranded at the hotel. He had reached it after leaving Noddy the night previous, and expected his companion to follow, after repairing the auto, and pick him up. But the encounter between Noddy and the Motor Boys made the former change his plans, and he ran the machine through the village without stopping for Berry. Later, however, Noddy came back and got his companion.

For some time Nestor and the boys conversed about the gold mine, the man telling the lads many stories of western life. Jerry had completed his purchases by dusk, the auto tanks were refilled with gasolene and water, and the start was made early the next morning.

A few hours of travel brought the adventurers to the Mississippi River, and crossing it, they found themselves in Missouri. For several days the auto journeyed on, and Kansas was more than half traversed.

One hot afternoon, passing over a road that led across the rolling prairie, Bob, who was

steering, looked ahead and noticed quite a cloud of dust.

"Looks like a whirlwind coming," he remarked.

Nestor stood up and peered forward.

"So it is, but not the kind you're used to," he said.

"What kind is it?"

"Cowboys, an' they're headed right for us. I expect there'll be some fun presently," and the miner began loading his big revolver.

"Will they—will they kill us?" asked Bob.

"Well, no; not exactly kill you," spoke the miner, slowly, "but they'll try to scare you to death, and that's about as bad."

The wind now bore to the ears of the boys a thundering sound. It was the rapid hoof-beats of the cowboys' ponies as they raced along. As yet nothing of the riders could be seen because of the dust.

Suddenly there came from the center of the cloud a series of terrific yells, punctuated by a score of revolver shots. At the same time forty cowboys were disclosed to the astonished gaze of the Cresville lads. Bob stopped the machine, for it was fairly surrounded by a circle of the rough riders.

"Throw up your hands!" yelled one who seemed to be the leader of the herders. He was astride a black pony, and as he spoke he leveled two big revolvers at the party in the auto.

Tremblingly, the boys obeyed.

"I mean you, too, you old greaser on the back of this new-fangled stage coach!" exclaimed the leader, waving his gun at Nestor. "Put up your hands, an' do it mighty suddint!"

Nestor's reply was a shot from his revolver, and the hat of the leader went spinning in the air.

"Here!" cried the cowboy, angrily, but not returning the fire, "don't you know better than to shoot a gentleman's hat off?"

"Gentlemen?" inquired Nestor, standing up and surveying the bunch of cattlemen, with a smile. "I don't see any."

There was a laugh among the herdsmen at the discomfiture of their leader, and seeing the joke was against him, the man on the black pony joined in the merriment.

"We didn't intend no harm nohow," he said. "We're jest out for a lark, an' we seen your Old Nick wagon comin' along. No offense I hope. We was only jokin'!"

"Don't mention it," said Nestor, who seemed to know how to take the cowboys. "I suppose my friends may now lower their hands," for Jerry, Ned and Bob still held their arms aloft.

"Sure!" cried the leader, quickly. "Come on, boys, three cheers for the tenderfeet!" he exclaimed, turning to his companions.

The cheers were given with a will, some of the

more exuberant of the cow-punchers firing their guns in the air.

"Some of us boys would like mighty well to take a little spin in that shebang," spoke the leader to Nestor. "S'pose we could take a few turns?"

"I reckon so," answered the miner, and he spoke a few quick words to Jerry, advising that the wish of the cowboys be complied with, as they might, in their recklessness, make trouble if they were denied.

Jerry took Bob's place at the wheel, the others got out and the leader of the cowboys and two of his companions got into the auto. They were delighted with the way Jerry spun the machine along. By turns nearly all of the cattle rustlers were given a short journey in the car.

Then three, who seemed full of the spirit of mischief, took their seats. No sooner had Jerry started off with them than the cowboy in the seat with him tried to grab the steering wheel.

"Hold on there!" exclaimed the boy.

"That's all right, sonny," said the cowboy. "I reckon I can run this as well as you. Let me have a turn at it. I'll show you what's what!"

Jerry was firm in his refusal to let the man run the machine. He knew the cattle-puncher would speedily come to grief. Nestor observed the little difficulty and appealed to the leader to use his persuasion on the refractory fellow.

But the latter's two companions now joined in his demand, and Jerry was being roughly handled as the men sought to put him from his seat. Suddenly the boy brought the car to a stop. He had a plan in mind.

"Did you ever see an automobile turn a somersault?" he asked the man who had first wanted to steer.

"No, I didn't, sonny," was the answer.

"Would you like to see it?"

"Bet your boots."

"I can't do it with you in, it takes experts to work that trick," went on Jerry. "If you will kindly get out and allow my friends to get back in, I think I can surprise you."

"Whoop!" yelled the cowboys in the auto, as they descended. "Whoop! Now for some fun!"

Jerry drove the car to where Nestor, Bob and Ned were standing. He motioned them to get in, and they obeyed, wondering what he was going to do. The cowboys, gathered in a wide circle about the machine, looked on in anticipation of seeing the auto do a flip-flop.

"Hold fast!" cautioned Jerry to his companions in the car. They did so. The next instant the boy put on full power and dashed straight at the encircling ring of cattlemen.

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURING A HORSE THIEF.

"WHOOP! Watch it turn over!" yelled some of the cowboys.

But Jerry kept straight on. Nearer and nearer he came to the ring. At length, ten feet away, when he feared he would have to put on the emergency brake to avoid a collision, the nervous mustangs in front of the car broke into a frightened run and dashed over the prairie, while Jerry guided the car away from the herdsmen, who were soon left far behind.

"I told them I'd give 'em a surprise, and I did," said Jerry. "I didn't promise to make the auto turn a flip-flop, I only asked them if they ever saw it done. Well, I never did, either. I guess things are about evened up."

The astonished cries of the cattlemen left no doubt but that Jerry's trick to escape from them had been very much of a surprise.

"They didn't intend any harm," said Nestor. "I know the character of cowboys. They're full of fun an' thoughtless. It's jest as well we got

away, though. No tellin' what damage they'd have done to the machine."

The auto rolled along for several miles and the occupants were beginning to think of supper, which they planned to eat in a small town about three miles further on.

"What's that?" asked Ned, pointing off to the left of the road. The others looked, and saw strolling over the prairie a peculiar figure.

It was that of a little man, wearing a big, flapping brimmed hat. The old fellow held a big butterfly net in his right hand, and a large, green box in the other. On his back was slung a bag. Every now and then the stranger would raise the net high in the air and bring it down with a swoop.

"That's funny," remarked Jerry.

"Looks to me like he was looney," suggested Nestor.

Jerry brought the machine to a stop. The queer little man came nearer. His eyes were staring in front of him at something he seemed to desire to capture in the net. Whatever it was it continually escaped him.

At length the odd figure was close to the automobile. Yet the little man did not notice the car. Suddenly his eyes glanced at one of the big front tires. The boys looked and saw perched on the rubber a small, brown butterfly.

"Softly—softly!" exclaimed the little man,

speaking to himself. "Easy now. I have you, my beauty. Long have you escaped me, but I am on your trail. Ah! Don't move now. Softly! There!"

He banged the net down on the tire, sprang forward and caught the meshes between his fingers. Through his bespectacled eyes he peered eagerly at what he thought he had captured. A disappointed look came on his face.

"Got away again!" he muttered. Then he looked up and saw the party in the auto watching him. He did not seem in the least surprised. At once his eyes fastened on Jerry.

"Don't move! Don't move! I beg of you!" he cried to the boy. "Don't stir as you value your life. I'll lose one thousand dollars if you move the hundredth part of an inch! Easy now. Ah! There you are, my little brown beauty. Don't move, my boy, and I'll catch it in a second!"

Somewhat puzzled at the little man's words, Jerry sat still. His companions saw on his back the little brown butterfly that had escaped from the tire.

Quickly the little man brought his net down on Jerry's shoulders. Once more the meshes were eagerly grasped, and this time it seemed with success, for the little man set up a yell of delight and capered about like a boy who has found a hornets' nest.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he cried. "One of the rarest butterflies that exist. I've been chasing after this one all day. I knew I'd get it. But pardon me, gentlemen. No doubt you are surprised. Allow me to introduce myself. Professor Uriah Snodgrass, A. M., Ph.D., M. D., F. R. G. S., etc."

"Is that all, pardner?" asked Nestor, with a grin.

"I contemplate taking the degree of B. A. this winter, when I have completed my study of the fauna and flora of the prairies," replied the little man.

Jerry introduced himself and his companions, and said they were making a tour across country.

"Just what I am doing myself," said Professor Snodgrass. "I am collecting specimens of rare plants, stones, bugs, butterflies, in fact, anything that can add to knowledge and science. I have been out all day——"

He stopped talking and made a sudden grab at the sleeve of Nestor's coat.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed the miner. Rattlesnake?"

"Pardon me!" replied the professor. "There was a very scarce specimen of what is commonly called the potato bug on you, and I wanted it."

"I'd rather you'd have it than me," observed Nestor.

"Thank you," replied Professor Snodgrass, as he placed the bug, together with the butterfly, in his green box. "What was I saying?"

"That you had been out all day," repeated Jerry.

"Oh, yes! I left town early this morning, and my labors have been richly repaid. See, I have my box and bag nearly full."

He showed the box. Through the glass top the boys could see that it was full of toads, grasshoppers, small snakes, lizards, bugs, butterflies and bees. The bag was loaded with stones, grass, pieces of wood, plants and flowers.

"It has been a grand day," went on the professor, enthusiastically, "and I haven't had a bit of dinner."

"None of that for mine," put in Nestor. "I wouldn't go without my meals for all the bugs and stones in the world."

"Ah, but you are not a naturalist," observed the professor, wiping his bald head.

"Did you walk all the way?" asked Ned.

"No; I had a horse. And, bless my soul, I've forgotten what I did with the beast. I got off him early this morning to chase after that brown butterfly and I left the horse standing somewhere on the prairie."

"He evidently was too fond of your company to leave you, however," said Jerry.

"Why so, young man?" and the professor gazed up through his spectacles.

"Because that is evidently him coming along back there," and Jerry pointed to a horse slowly approaching.

"Ah, yes! There he is. I'm glad I didn't lose him, for I suppose the man from whom I hired him would have been angry."

"I guess yes," spoke Nestor, in a whisper.

"If you are going into town we'll ride along with you," said Ned. "That is, if your horse isn't afraid of automobiles."

"I don't think he is afraid of anything," replied the professor. "I captured a fine specimen of grasshopper on his left ear this morning, and he never shied when I put the net over his head."

The little man, seeing that his bag and box were safely strapped to his back, and folding up his net, mounted the horse that had approached where he was standing and started off alongside of the auto, which Jerry ran slowly.

The boys learned that the professor was stopping in the same town where they planned to spend the night.

"We'll be there very soon now," observed the little man, "and I'll be glad of it, for I'm hungry."

Suddenly, from behind, there came a wild chorus of yells and shouts, revolver shots mingling with the noise.

"It's the cowboys coming back!" cried Ned.

"Nonsense; they are miles behind us," observed Nestor.

"Well, they're some kind of cowboys, anyhow," cried Jerry. "And they're after us."

Bang! bang! went the guns. "Whoop!" yelled the cattlemen who were riding like mad. "Stop the horse thief!" they shouted.

Nearer and nearer came the cattlemen, a bunch similar to those who had wanted to run the auto.

"They seem to be after us," observed Bob.

"We haven't stolen any horses," said Ned.

"What's all the noise about?" asked Professor Snodgrass, suddenly becoming aware that there was some commotion. He was riding close to the auto.

There came a hissing, whistling sound in the air. A long, thin line shot forward. A loop settled around the professor's neck. The next instant he was jerked, none too gently, from the back of his horse and fell to the ground. He had been lassoed from behind by one of the cowboys.

Jerry shut off the power and the auto stopped. In a few seconds it was surrounded by a crowd of angry men. Several of them drew their revolvers, while two or three busied themselves in securely binding the poor professor.

"What's all this for?" asked Nestor, getting ready to draw his gun.

"I don't know as it's any of your business, unless you're in on the game," spoke a dark-complexioned cowboy, who seemed to be the leader.

"What game?" asked the miner.

"Stealing horses," was the reply.

"Who's stolen any nags around here?" demanded Nestor.

"That bald-headed galoot!" exclaimed the cowboy. "We want him for taking that pony he was riding. It belongs to One-Eyed Pete."

"He never stole that!" exclaimed Jerry.

"He didn't, eh? Well, he can tell that to Judge Lynch. There's only one thing happens to horse thieves in this country.

"Swing him up!" yelled the cowboys, yanking Professor Snodgrass to his feet.

CHAPTER XII.

THE AUTO ON FIRE.

"CAN'T we save him?" cried Jerry to Nestor. "He never took that horse. It's all a mistake."

"It's no use to reason with those brutes," said the miner. "They evidently believe they're right. It's too bad, but we'd only git into trouble if we interfered."

"Bring him along, boys!" cried the leader. "There's a tree that will do to swing him from, and I've got the rope!"

The boys were almost horror-stricken at the scene they were about to witness. It was bad enough to see any one hanged, but to witness the death of the little bug-hunting man they all believed innocent was too much.

The cowboys, with the poor professor in their midst, rode across the prairie to where a single tree grew. They had quieted down, now that their man-hunt was over. Jerry started the auto and steered it across the rolling land toward the scene of the prospective lynching.

"What are you going to do?" asked Nestor.

"I can't desert him," replied Jerry. "Maybe we can get the cowboys to let him go."

Nestor shook his head pityingly. He knew the rough western men too well. They never let even a suspected horse thief escape.

Little time was lost in preparation. Once beneath the tree the men formed in a circle. The rope was thrown over a limb and a noose made. The professor was placed beneath it, and the other end of the rope was grasped by a dozen hands.

"Have you anything to say before we string you up?" asked the leader.

Aside from a little paleness, which hardly showed in the waning afternoon, Professor Snodgrass gave no sign of what must be a terrible ordeal for him. He did not seem to appreciate what was taking place.

Suddenly, as he stood beneath the fatal noose, he leaned forward. One hand sought the green box which was still strapped to his back. The other went out with a cautious gesture to the arm of the leader of the cowboys.

"Don't stir! Don't move for the world!" exclaimed the professor, in a strained whisper. "Just a second and I'll have him!"

His hand closed on something on the leader's coat-sleeve and he uttered a cry that was more of delight than fear.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he cried.

"Got what?" asked the cowboy.

"One of the rarest specimens of a prairie lizard that exists!" replied the professor, as, all unconscious of the dangling noose, he thrust the specimen into his green box. "This is certainly a lucky day for me."

"I'd say it was particularly unlucky," observed the leader, with a grim smile, adjusting the noose about the neck of the naturalist.

"Why, what's all the fuss about?" asked the professor, noticing for the first time that he was in a crowd. "Has anything happened?"

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Nestor, who overheard the conversation. "The poor professor is so absent-minded that he don't know he's been lassoed and is all ready to be strung up!"

"Hold fast!" exclaimed Jerry, suddenly. "I'm going to rescue him!"

"How?" asked Nestor.

"I'm going to run the auto in close to him. When I do, you reach out and grab him up."

"Sure, I'm on!" said Nestor.

Jerry gave a loud blast on the horn. The cowboys, who did not know exactly what to do about hanging a man who didn't seem to mind being lynched, turned to see what was going on, having forgotten all about the auto. There was a living lane between the men right up to where the bug collector stood.

Jerry sent the machine ahead with a rush. Straight at the professor he steered it. Then, when very close to the bug hunter he gave the wheel a twist.

Nestor, who was in the rear seat, on the side nearest Mr. Snodgrass, leaned over. As he swept past the professor the miner grabbed him up, box, basket, net and all, and lifted him into the auto.

"Full speed ahead!" yelled Nestor, and Jerry threw on all the power he had.

The little, bald-headed man was yanked from under the tree, and, as the noose was about his neck the rope came along with him, pulled from the surprised and unresisting hands of the cowboys.

They gave a great shout of astonishment, and several leaped on their horses to give pursuit. Others drew their revolvers and fired at the fast-vanishing auto, but the machine was soon out of reach of the bullets.

"That's what I call pullin' off a pretty neat trick," observed Nestor. "They'd have hung you in another minute, professor."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you," observed the little man, calmly. "I hope my specimens are not injured, for I have some very valuable ones."

"Well, he is the limit!" said Nestor, half to himself. "He gits pulled out of the very jaws of death an' all he cares about is his bugs an' butterflies!"

Soon they were nearly at the town where they were to stop overnight. The professor, who seemed a little dazed from what he had gone through, was gazing at the rope that had been taken from his neck and tossed to the floor of the tonneau. All at once he stood up and shot a glance at a horse that was grazing beside the road.

"Hold on!" he cried.

"What's the matter—want to take another nag?" asked Nestor.

"No; but that is the horse I hired. I recognize him by the extra butterfly net I fastened to the saddle. I was afraid I might lose one. The other horse wasn't mine."

"Wasn't yours?" fairly shouted the miner. "Then whose was it?"

"It must have belonged to the cowboys," was the answer. "You see, I forgot all about my horse until I met you. Then I took the first animal I saw. I supposed, of course, it was mine."

"Then you really were a horse thief after all," said Ned, laughing, "though you didn't know it."

"And the cowboys were right, as far as they knew," observed Jerry. "They saw you on one of their horses and naturally thought you stole it. However, it all came out right, and I guess I did the best thing when I rescued you, for they might have hanged you before the mistake was found out."

The auto created no little surprise as it puffed through the western town, though a sign, "Gasolene for Sale," exhibited in front of the drug store, indicated that machines sometimes paid a visit. The hotel where Professor Snodgrass was stopping was soon reached, and every one washed up and had supper.

The next morning, after a few minor repairs had been made to the auto, and the gasolene tank replenished, the travelers prepared to start away again. The professor was up to see them off.

"I wish I was going with you," he said, with a pleasant smile, after they had told him something of the trip they had in view.

"Why can't you?" inquired Jerry. "We are going into somewhat new territory, and you may be able to collect some fine specimens. We can easily make room for you."

"I might go along with you on a horse," ventured the little man.

"That's too risky," observed Nestor. "Take the boys' offer and come along without a horse."

"I believe I will; I have nothing to keep me here," said the bug collector, and so it was arranged.

A good stock of provisions was laid in, the auto being piled with all it could hold and still leave room for the five passengers. Nestor said they would probably have to camp out a few nights, as

on leaving Kansas and skirting down into New Mexico, settlements were few and far between. So some rubber and woolen blankets were added to the outfit.

So far the weather had been fine, but this morning there was a haze in the sky that denoted a storm. It did not worry any one, however, and made the professor smile.

"There'll be so many more grasshoppers and bugs for me after the shower," he observed.

An hour passed, and the auto was bowling along at a good pace on a level stretch of road. Soon Nestor, who was sitting in front with Bob, who was steering, jumped up.

"What's the matter?" inquired Jerry. "One of the professor's grasshoppers bite you?"

"The seat seems to be gittin' too hot for comfort," said the miner.

From beneath the auto there came a muffled explosion, followed by a big cloud of smoke. Then flames shot out, and the whole under side of the car was enveloped.

"We're on fire!" yelled Bob, preparing to jump.

"Sit still!" exclaimed Jerry. "Don't let go the wheel whatever you do!"

"Turn off the gasolene!" cried Ned. "The tank is leaking and the gasolene is burning!"

There was great excitement. The only person who kept his head was Professor Snodgrass. He

did not seem to know the auto was on fire, but was calmly examining a small bug crawling on the cushion near him.

"What shall we do?" wailed Bob. "The auto will be destroyed!"

"We're in a bad fix!" muttered the miner.

Bob reached over to shut off the power, and was making ready to jump.

"Sit still!" exclaimed Jerry.

"And be killed?" objected Bob.

The smoke became more dense and the flames spouted up higher around the car.

"Quick! There's a small creek! Steer for it!" yelled Jerry, pointing ahead.

Bob saw the water and realized Jerry's plan. He quickly turned the auto toward the water. There was a sort of ford turning off from the main road, which latter led over a small bridge.

Into the creek dashed the burning machine. There was a hiss as the water reached the flames, and clouds of steam arose.

Then, amid a swish of spray, the machine shot out on the opposite bank, only the machinery, as far up as the under side of the floor of the car, having been submerged. The fire was put out as good as if a whole city department had been called to battle with the flames.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT DEAD MAN'S GULCH.

Bob brought the auto to a stop under a big sycamore tree. The engine was still smoking, and there was considerable heat. Jerry jumped out and examined the car.

"Not much damage done," he said, after a long inspection. "I guess we can fix it up."

"Can we go on?" asked Ned, anxiously.

"It will take a good hour to mend things," replied Jerry.

"That will give me a chance to gather some bugs," observed the professor. "Pardon me," he exclaimed to Nestor. "There is a beautiful specimen of a katydid on your leg," and, with a deft gesture, the bug collector captured the insect and transferred it to his box.

"I hope you didn't want it yourself," said the naturalist, looking rather anxiously at the miner, who seemed surprised.

"Oh, land, no!" was the reply. "Help yourself whenever you see any of the crawlin' things on me.

It's a favor, more than anything else. I hate bugs an' things."

While the professor wandered about with his net, Jerry proceeded to repair the leak to the gasolene tank. Bob and Ned decided they were hungry, and got out some lunch, of which, a little later, all were glad to partake.

"There," announced Jerry, "I guess we can go on again."

"There's a good place to camp about twenty miles farther on," said Nestor.

"What place is it?" asked Ned.

"Dead Man's Gulch," was the grim reply.

"Doesn't sound very pleasant," observed Bob.

"It's a better locality than it sounds, Chunky," went on Nestor. "There's a little town there, if you want to sleep in beds."

The boys decided to push for the Gulch, not that sleeping in beds was an inducement, for they rather liked the idea of resting in the open. But the gathering clouds indicated rain, and that would make camping out rather damp.

Without further mishap the machine was sent along. Ned was at the wheel and he turned on plenty of gasolene so that the car fairly skimmed over the roads. As they passed a stone post on the highway, Nestor called out:

"Good-by, Kansas!"

"What's that for?" asked Ned.

"Because that's the boundary mark between Kansas and Indian Territory," replied the miner. "We are now on the old Indian ground, pretty soon we'll be in Texas, and then we'll land in New Mexico."

"We're getting to be travelers for fair!" remarked Bob.

The gathering clouds became blacker and a strong wind sprang up. There was every prospect of a severe storm, and Ned sent the machine ahead still faster. As it came to the top of a little hill, Nestor exclaimed:

"There's Dead Man's Gulch!"

Looking down into the valley, the boys saw a small settlement.

"Hold the machine back," cautioned the miner. "It may get away from you on the grade."

Ned shut off the power and coasted down. In half an hour they reached the level and started up the road, which led into the main street, and, in fact, the only thoroughfare in the town. Just as they reached the solitary hotel in the settlement the rain came down in torrents.

The auto was run under a shed and the occupants entered the hostelry, to the no small surprise of the inmates of the place, who had not heard the car come up.

"Howdy, strangers?" called the clerk, a big man, with an immense black moustache.

"Howdy?" responded Nestor, who seemed much at his ease, though the boys were rather startled to find themselves in what was evidently rough company.

"Where ye from?" asked the clerk.

"East," replied Nestor.

"Where ye goin'?"

"West."

"Ain't much on the talk, be ye, stranger?" sneered the clerk.

"I am when it suits me."

"Aw! he's one of them stuck-up automobilists!" put in a tall, thin, dark-complexioned man, who was sitting in one chair, with his feet in another.

"An' who might you be?" asked Nestor, turning to him.

"Pud Stoneham, at your service," and the dark man bowed with elaborate grace, a sneering smile spreading over his face.

"Well, you'd better be mindin' your own business!" snapped Nestor, turning away.

"What's that!" exclaimed Stoneham, who was a gambler, hanging around the hotel on the lookout for victims. "I don't allow any man to insult me!" and he reached his hand to his hip-pocket, with a quick gesture.

Before he could draw his gun, which was his intention, Nestor had him covered with a weapon.

"No shootin', gentlemen!" called the clerk. "Against the rules. Put up your gun, stranger."

"Not unless he agrees to put up his," stipulated Nestor.

"I'll make him," said the clerk. And, with a scowl, Stoneham promised to be peaceable. In a little while he sneaked out.

Nestor and the boys registered and were assigned to rooms for the night. The hotel was not a very stylish one, but they were glad even for the rough accommodations when they heard the torrent of rain outside.

While they were washing up for supper, Ned suddenly called out:

"Hark!"

"What is it? The place on fire?" asked Jerry.

"I thought I heard an automobile horn," replied Ned.

"Maybe some boys are monkeying with our machine," came from Bob.

"No, it isn't that, Chunky," went on Ned, looking from a window.

"What then?"

"It's another automobile coming up the road. My, how the mud and water splashes! And, say! Good land! Who do you suppose is in the car?"

"The President?" answered Jerry, sozzling his face in the water.

"It's Noddy Nixon, Jack Pender and Bill Berry!"

"No!"

"Yes, it is!"

The others crowded to the windows to look. Sure enough, there were the three enemies of the Motor Boys. They ran their machine up under the shed where stood the red auto, and then Ned lost sight of them.

"Well, it's a free country," observed Nestor. "It looks as if they were following you, but there's no law to prevent it. I guess they won't stay here long, though, after that chap that robbed me knows I'm stopping at this hotel. Wait until I get my hands on him."

"Perhaps it would be better not to let him know who you are," suggested Jerry. "They may be up to some trick, and we can work to better advantage against them by keeping quiet."

"Right you are," admitted the miner, after thinking the matter over. "He wouldn't know me if he saw me, since I got shaved. We'll just lay low an' watch."

The Motor Boys, with Nestor and Professor Snodgrass, were the first ones down to the dining-room to supper. In a little while Noddy, Jack and Bill entered. The three latter started in surprise at beholding the Cresville boys, and for a moment seemed undecided what to do. Then, at a

whispered word from Berry, they filed to the other side of the room and took their seats at a table.

"I wonder if they really followed us," Jerry said.

"Must have," was Nestor's opinion. "But I reckon they didn't expect to find you here."

"But what can their object be?"

"I don't think they exactly know themselves," replied the miner. "I guess they hope to annoy you, or they may expect to get a line on what our plans are. But we'll try to fool 'em."

Before the meal was over, Pud Stoneham came in and took a seat at Noddy's table. In a little while the gambler seemed to be on good terms with Bill Berry and his companions.

It was still raining hard when the three boys, with the professor and Nestor, went up to bed. The naturalist and the boys had two rooms, while Nestor was by himself. Noddy and his chums disappeared after the meal, Pud Stoneham accompanying them.

It must have been about midnight when Nestor was awakened by hearing voices in the room next to his. At first he paid no attention to them, for he was sleepy. But he sat up suddenly when he heard some one say:

"They're on the trail of a rich gold mine. I know, for I heard the old man talking about it."

"Are you sure, Bill?" asked a second voice, which Nestor recognized as Noddy's.

"Sure as I am that my name is Berry," was the reply.

"Then, count me in on the game," said a third man, whom the miner had no difficulty in knowing was Pud Stoneham. "I've got money. We'll go in this together and win out. I owe that miner something for insulting me, an' I'll pay him back, too!"

CHAPTER XIV.

NODDY STEALS A MARCH.

NESTOR sat up in bed, listening with all his might. But though he could hear a murmur of voices in the next room, and though he was certain Noddy and his companions were plotting against him and his friends, the miner could hear nothing more definite.

"Forewarned is forearmed," he said, softly. "We'll see who'll win out, Pud Stoneham!"

Nestor was up early the next morning. The weather had cleared and it was a beautiful day. The boys came down to breakfast with heavy eyes, for they had slept soundly. Professor Snodgrass, too, had arisen early, and was already searching for rare bugs.

"I want to get a red tree-toad," he explained, as he strolled up at the sound of the breakfast gong, "but I am afraid they are not to be had."

Suddenly he grabbed Ned's arm as the boy was walking toward the automobile shed.

"One moment, I beg of you!" exclaimed the professor. "Steady now! Ah! I have the beauty.

He was right on the back of your neck!" And he reached over and took from Ned's coat a small insect.

"It's an extremely choice specimen of a sand flea," said the professor, proudly, popping the little animal into a glass case. "I hope I did not discommode you in removing it from you."

"Not at all," laughed Ned, and the others smiled at the simple earnestness of the bug collector.

"I want to have a talk with you boys after breakfast," spoke Nestor.

His grave manner somewhat alarmed them, and they started to ask questions, but he would say nothing until after the meal. Then he told about what he had heard.

"What worries me," said the miner, "is that I saw about the hotel a fellow that tried to follow me an' my pardner one day, and locate the lost mine. This chap's name is Tom Dalsett, and I saw him talking to Stoneham, the gambler, just before we came in to breakfast. Some mischief is in the wind when two such fellows whisper together."

"Do you suppose they will try to get to the mine ahead of us?" asked Jerry.

"I haven't a doubt of it," replied the miner. "We've got to look sharp from now on."

"Had we better start right away?" inquired Ned.

"It will do no harm to wait until the roads dry up a bit," was Nestor's opinion. "In the meanwhile, see to the machine. Look over every part. They may have damaged it during the night. See to your guns, too. We're going to have trouble from now on, or my name isn't Jim Nestor."

His words rather alarmed the boys, but they were not going to back out now, and rather relished, than otherwise, a conflict with their old enemy, Noddy Nixon.

Jerry went to the shed where the automobile had been left for the night. As he opened the door he uttered a cry of surprise.

"What's the matter, have they taken our machine?" asked Ned.

"No, they haven't done that, but they've skipped in their own," said Jerry. "I wonder if they have done any mischief to ours?"

"That gang has stolen a march on us, all right," spoke Nestor. "They've gone on ahead. Well, they may get to the mine first, but we'll give them the hardest kind of a fight for the possession of it. I'm not going to lose a fortune if I can help it."

Jerry soon ascertained that the red machine was not damaged. Nestor made inquiries and learned that the other party had left before daybreak, Pud Stoneham accompanying them.

"What became of that chap with one eye and a scar on his left cheek?" asked Nestor of the hotel clerk, the description fitting Dalsett.

"Oh, he went off with the others in the gasolene gig this morning," was the reply.

It was plain now that Noddy and his gang were going to make a bold strike to discover the lost mine ahead of Nestor and his friends. How the Cresville bully had trailed the Motor Boys as far as he had was somewhat of a mystery, though it was afterward learned that he had been closer behind them after they left Chicago than they supposed. The meeting at the hotel was an accident, though.

A stiff breeze sprang up, and soon dried the muddy roads. An early dinner was eaten and once more the party started forward, this time in pursuit of Noddy.

"It's too bad to have to leave without getting that red tree-toad," said Professor Snodgrass.

"We'll take you to a place where you can get horned toads," said Nestor.

"Oh, that will be fine!" exclaimed the naturalist, with a boy's enthusiasm.

The roads were none of the best, and the auto could not be speeded with safety. Nestor explained that the best plan would be to steer straight south for a while, after reaching New Mexico, and skirt around the edge of the mountain range,

rather than attempt to make their way across the Rockies.

"It will take a little longer," he said, "but sometimes the longest way 'round is the shortest way home. We'll aim for Messilla, which is not far from El Paso, and it's somewhat civilized there, so we can get supplies if we need 'em."

The boys voted this plan a good one. By noon the auto had crossed the narrow stretch of land which is part of Indian Territory, lying between Texas and Colorado. Then they were in the big State of Texas, and, when night came on, they found themselves on a vast plain.

"It's a case of camp out to-night," said the miner. "Now we'll see what sort of stuff you boys are made of."

But if Nestor expected to find the Motor Boys tenderfeet, he was mistaken. They had camped out too many times before not to know what to do.

The auto was run under the brow of a little hill, and Jerry took charge of things. Bob gathered wood for a fire and Ned went on a hunt for water. He found a little stream that answered admirably. Jerry got out the coffee-pot and frying-pan, and soon had supper cooking.

There was fried canned chicken, with crisp slices of bacon, some thick biscuits, a jar of pickles and steaming hot coffee ready in a few minutes. Bob

got out the tin dishes, and, seating themselves on the ground, the adventurers made a hearty meal.

"Well, I must give you boys credit for knowin' a wrinkle or two," spoke Nestor. "I couldn't have done any better myself."

"It's a good thing I bought some of those canned goods," said Jerry. "I thought that would be better than depending on what we could hunt."

Supper over, and the things put away, the boys got out their blankets in readiness for the night. Nestor lighted his pipe and was puffing away, while in the fast-gathering dusk Professor Snodgrass went searching for rare specimens. He was successful in capturing two odd grass snakes, and seemed quite delighted. Then, as night settled down, each one rolled himself up in his blanket and fell asleep.

Ned awoke first the next morning, and soon had the fire going and coffee made. The aromatic smell of the beverage greeted the others as they roused themselves, and soon a simple but satisfying breakfast was served. Then the journey was continued.

It was a fine day, and the adventurers breathed in great whiffs of the pure air as their car dashed along. They passed through one or two small settlements, but inquiries failed to develop any traces of Noddy and his companions.

"They may be going straight over the moun-

tains," said Nestor. "Well, even if they do I think we'll beat them in the race for the mine. Mountain climbing is mighty onsartin' in one of these machines."

But, had they only known it, Noddy and his gang were not aiming for the mountains, and were but a little way in advance of our friends. However, the Motor Boys soon learned, to their cost, where their enemy was.

It was well along in the afternoon, and dinner had been eaten at a rude shack of a hotel in a small village, that the auto was skimming along, due south. Off to the right were the foothills of the mighty Rocky Mountains, while to the left was a vast rolling plain. Jerry was steering, with Bob on the seat beside him, while in the rear were the others, Professor Snodgrass busily engaged in sorting over some of his specimens.

All at once a low, rumbling sound was heard.

"Is that thunder?" asked Ned.

"Can't be," replied Nestor. "There's not a cloud in the sky." Then he stood up and glanced behind him.

"Great Scott!" he yelled. "Put on all the speed you've got!"

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry.

"Matter?" shouted the miner. "There's a herd of stampeded cattle coming straight for us. If they're not turned aside they'll go over us like a

locomotive over a fly! Quick! Turn over toward the hills! Maybe we can escape them!"

In terror, the boys looked behind them. Coming on with a mad rush, with a thunder of thousands of hoofs, and deep-mouthed bellows, were the steers, galloping like the wind!

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

JERRY headed the machine toward the foothills. Once among them the adventurers might escape. The auto was going almost at full speed, swaying from side to side on the rough road. Nestor, who was keeping watch of the herd, cried out:

"I'm afraid it's no use. They have turned and are right after us!"

The steers had changed their course to follow the red auto, which they probably took for an enemy. The thunder of their hoofs came nearer.

Fast as the auto was going, its speed was not enough to take it out of reach of the infuriated animals, for the rough prairie was retarding it, but it was just the kind of country the cattle loved.

Even Nestor, familiar as he was with danger, seemed much alarmed at the plight. The boys' hearts were well-nigh terror-stricken, but as for Professor Snodgrass, he did not appear at all frightened. He still kept on sorting his specimens.

The auto topped a little hill, having to slow up a bit at the grade. Down it went on the other side,

but still the steers came on. A long level stretch of country appeared.

"We ought to be able to get away from them here!" cried Jerry, turning on more gasolene and increasing the current from the batteries. The auto seemed to jump forward.

"Look out! Stop!" yelled Nestor, seizing Jerry by the arm.

"We can't! We'll be killed if we do!" shouted the boy, thinking the miner had lost his head through fear.

"And we'll be dashed to death if we keep on! We're running straight for a precipice three hundred feet high! Shut down the machine or we'll go over the cliff!"

With a yank at the levers, Jerry turned off the power and put on the brakes. And it was only just in time, for, not one hundred feet ahead, the prairie came to an abrupt end, terminating in a sheer bluff, over which the auto and those in it would have been dashed had not the miner's practiced eye told him what to expect. He recognized the conformation of the land and knew what was coming.

The adventurers were now between two dangers. They could not go on because of the precipice, and their escape to the rear was cut off by the maddened steers that now were but a quarter of a mile away, thundering on fiercely. To turn to the left or

right was impossible, as the line of cattle was a curving one, like a pair of horns, and to go to either side meant to run straight into the midst of the beasts.

"Let's get out of the machine and shoot as many as we can!" cried Ned, drawing his revolver. "Maybe we can scare them away!"

"Don't think of it!" exclaimed Nestor. "Cattle are used to seeing men only on horseback or in wagons. Once on the ground we'd be trampled under foot in an instant. Our only hope is to stay in the machine. It will protect us somewhat when they rush over us."

"Shall we shoot?" asked Jerry.

"Our only chance is to turn them to one side, and shooting at them may do it," replied the miner. "Get ready and we'll all fire at once."

Each one drew his revolver, even Professor Snodgrass taking an extra one Nestor had. The cattle were now about eight hundred feet away.

"Fire!" cried Nestor.

The five revolvers spurted slivers of flame, smoke and bullets. In rapid succession every chamber was emptied, but the rush of the steers was not checked. In fact, none of the cattle seemed to have been killed, or, if any were, they fell down and were trampled under the hoofs of the others.

"I guess we're done for!" groaned Nestor. "Crouch down on the bottom of the car!"

The galloping animals were almost at the auto. Suddenly there sounded a fusillade of shots, mingled with wild yells. Jerry peered up over the edge of his seat. He saw a man on a horse, riding straight across in front of the line of cattle. In one hand the stranger held a big revolver, which he fired right into the faces of the steers. In the other he held his coat, which he was waving like a flag.

At the same time he was yelling like a man gone mad. The reins of his horse lay loose on the animal's neck, but the beast knew what was expected of him.

It seemed that the stranger would be knocked down and trampled under thousands of sharp hoofs. But he did not seem afraid, riding closer and closer to the line of steers. He emptied one revolver and drew another, never ceasing to yell or wave his coat.

Suddenly, with wild bellows, the leaders of the cattle turned. They were frightened at the strange figure before them. For a few seconds there was great confusion amid the mass of steers. Those behind the line of leaders tried to go straight ahead, but the latter, once having made up their minds that they would turn to the left did so.

Then, like sheep following the bell-wether of the flock, the beasts took after their leaders. They rushed to one side, thundering past within twenty

THEY RUSHED TO ONE SIDE, THUNDERING PAST THE AUTO.—*Page* 114.

feet of the auto, while the stranger, pulling up his horse, still continued to wave his coat and shout.

"He's saved our lives!" exclaimed Nestor. "He's stampeded the cattle away from us in the nick of time!"

On and on galloped the steers until the last one disappeared over the rolling hills of the prairie. Then the man on the horse rode over to the auto.

"Howdy!" he called.

"Howdy!" replied Nestor.

"Got ye in kind of a tight place, didn't they?" went on the horseman.

"We would have been killed only for you," spoke Jerry and his voice told how thankful he was.

"Oh, shoo! That wa'n't nothin',' replied the stranger. "I seen ye comin' up in that there shebang of yours an' then I seen the cows chasin' ye. I was a leetle afraid ye'd go over the cliff, but ye stopped in time. Then I see it was up to me to stop them critters, an' I done it."

"Lucky for us you did," put in Nestor.

"I happened to be out huntin'," went on the horseman, "or I wouldn't have seen ye. I know cattle an' their ways an' I knowed there was only one way to head 'em off, an' that was to skeer 'em."

"I'm Jim Nestor," said the miner, and he told the names of his companions.

"Glad to meet ye," said the horseman, dis-

mounting and shaking hands with each one. "I'm Hank Broswick."

Nestor told the hunter something of the trip they were making, and Broswick in turn related how he was a free-lance hunter, roving over the prairies and among the mountains as suited his whims.

"Had yer suppers?" Broswick asked.

"No; an' I don't see any place around here to git 'em," spoke Nestor. "We've got some grub, though, an' we'd be pleased to have your company."

"Thanks. I can add my share to the meal," replied Broswick. "I'd jest shot some prairie chickens afore ye come up, an' we'll roast 'em."

While he went over to where he had left the fowls, Jerry backed the auto, turned it around, and sent it down the hill to the level plain.

"It's a case of camp out again to-night," observed Nestor.

"That suits me," spoke Ned, and the other boys agreed with him.

A fire was soon made, the prairie chickens were prepared for roasting, coffee was set on to boil, and with some tinned biscuits the adventurers made a hearty meal.

Sitting around the camp-fire as night came on, the hunter told several of his adventures while on the trail. Once he had a terrible fight with a

grizzly bear, the scars of the combat being visible on his face and arms.

"Are there any bears around here?" asked Bob.

"Not getting afraid, are you, Chunky?" queried Ned.

"No; I only just wanted to know," replied the stout youth, looking over his shoulder in as careless a manner as he could assume.

"Waal, there's a few now an' agin'," answered the hunter, "but they don't bother me much, not while I have this along," and he patted a rifle which he had left with his game before he rode out to stampede the cattle.

"Are you bound for any particular place?" asked Nestor of Hank.

"Nope; I'm my own boss."

"Then, why not come along with us?" proposed the miner. "We may need your help, for there's a bad gang ahead of us."

He told something of the plans of himself and the boys, in regard to the gold mine, and related how there were enemies in front, and added that he might pay the hunter for his time.

"I'll go 'long!" exclaimed the hunter, after a moment's thought. "I used to be a prospector myself."

More fuel was heaped on the fire, the adventurers wrapped themselves in their blankets and prepared to spend the night in the open.

It was past midnight when Bob was suddenly awakened by feeling some one trying to turn him over.

"Go 'way," he said, sleepily. "Let me alone."

Something cold and clammy was thrust against his face, and he heard the breathing and noted the peculiar smell of some wild animal.

With a shout of terror he sat upright. In the glow from the fire he saw, rearing up on his haunches before him, a big, black bear!

CHAPTER XVI.

A RUSH OF GOLD SEEKERS.

"HELP! help!" screamed Bob.

The bear made a dive for him and the boy cast himself forward on his face.

"What's the matter? What is it?" cried Hank Broswick, springing to his feet.

"Indians! Indians!" exclaimed Professor Snodgrass, rolling himself tightly up in his blanket.

"It isn't Indians! It's a bear killing Bob!" cried Jerry.

The animal, with savage growls, had pounced on the unfortunate boy and was trying to get hold of him with the powerful claws. Bob, after his first wild screams, became quiet, digging his fingers into the earth to hold himself down.

"Wait a minute! I'll kill the brute!" cried the hunter.

He had seized his ever-ready rifle and rushed over toward the bear. But the fierce beast was so close to Bob that Broswick could not fire without danger of hitting the lad.

"Here, boy, take the gun!" yelled the hunter to

Jerry. "If you see me getting the worst of it, fire!"

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed Jerry.

"I'm going to kill that brute with my knife!" cried Broswick.

Drawing a keen blade from the sheath at his belt, he jumped straight on the bear's back. The beast, with a fierce growl of rage, turned and tried to bite the legs of the strange enemy that was plunging something terrible and sharp into his shoulders.

Ned threw some wood on the fire. It blazed up brightly and, by the light of it, the boys and Nestor saw the bear rear on his haunches, with Broswick still clinging to his back.

The hunter had one hand clasped in the shaggy fur of the brute, and the other was sending the knife, again and again, into the thick skin, trying to reach a vital spot.

Bob had rolled to one side, out of harm's way, and suffered no more than a rough mauling by the brute. But Broswick was not to escape so easily.

With a sudden movement the bear turned, shook the hunter loose, and then, before the brave fellow could defend himself, the savage animal had clasped him in the terrible and powerful claws.

"Help! He's squeezing me to death!" Broswick cried.

His arms were pinned to his sides and he could

not get a chance to use his knife, which he still held.

Jerry saw his chance. Approaching close to the bear from behind, the boy placed the muzzle of the gun against the brute's head.

There was a loud report, a last fierce growl, and the animal, with a convulsive hug of the hunter, dropped over, dead. Jerry had shot just in time.

Broswick, too, fell to the earth and at first the boys thought he was killed. But in a little while he arose and felt of his arms and legs.

"I'm all here," he said. "Guess there ain't much harm done, but it was a pretty tight squeeze!"

"I thought you were a goner," spoke Jerry.

"That ain't nothin'," answered the hunter. "You ought to hev seen me fight a grizzly once!"

In the light of the fire, which was now blazing brightly, it was seen that the bear was a big specimen. As he lay stretched out on the ground he measured eight feet from his nose to his short tail.

"You know I tole ye there was a few bears now an' agin'," remarked the hunter, as he gave his former foe a kick. "Waal, I reckon some of 'em must 'a' heard me an' wanted to show I was tellin' the truth," he added, with a drawl.

No one felt much like sleep after this excitement, so they sat around the camp-fire until it began to get light. Then coffee was made, and the hunter proceeded to skin his prize. He cut off

some choice steaks, which were broiled over the coals. The boys thought they had never tasted anything so good.

After breakfast the tires were pumped up, the baggage was packed into the auto and preparations made for the start.

"Where's Professor Snodgrass?" asked Ned, noticing the absence of the naturalist. Then they all remembered that they had not seen him since the morning meal.

"He's probably off gathering some bugs or stones," said Jerry. "Let's give a yell to call him in."

In a chorus they gave a loud hallo, and in reply received a faint call from a small ravine.

"He's over there," said Broswick, pointing in the direction the voice had come from. "But hark! Sounds like he was in trouble!"

Faintly the wind bore to the adventurers the sound of the professor's voice pleading with some one.

"Now, please don't!" he was saying, or rather calling aloud. "You know you shouldn't do that! Let me alone, I say! Get out of my way or I'll throw a stone at you!"

"The Indians are after him!" exclaimed Bob.

"There are no Indians around here, Chunky," spoke Jerry. "You must have redskins on the brain."

Broswick and Nestor hurried over to the ravine. As they reached it they could be heard laughing long and heartily. Soon a small, wild goat was seen to run from the cut, leaping away over the plain. Out of the defile came the professor, Nestor and Broswick.

"The wild goat had him treed," spoke Nestor.

"Truly that was a savage brute," said the professor. "I was gathering some specimens, and had my arms full, when along comes this beast, with lowered horns, and nearly knocked me over. I had barely time to run for my life and climb a tree before he was after me again. His sharp horns scraped my shoe as I climbed. There I was, treed. I didn't dare come down, for fear he would eat me, or horn me to death. I don't know what I should have done if you gentlemen hadn't come along."

"Oh, we only scared him away!" said Broswick.

"Pardon me, just a moment," interrupted the professor, making a quick motion toward Nestor and picking something from his shoulder. "There, I have it. I am very much obliged to you."

"What sort of game did ye git this trip?" asked the hunter, somewhat amused at the naturalist.

"A rare specimen of the fly that lives in the wool of wild goats," replied the professor. "The insect is very valuable. It must have jumped from the goat to you."

After a little consultation the party started off, the auto making a pace slow enough so the hunter's horse could easily keep up. For several days the journey was continued, with no accidents to mar the way. The adventurers had reached well down into New Mexico by this time and had about one hundred miles farther to go before they could make the spur of the mountain and avoid going over the range.

One afternoon, following a good day's run, Ned brought the machine to a stop below a little hill, where it was decided to spend the night, as the place was sheltered.

Jerry happened to glance to the rear, over the back trail, as he was getting out the supper utensils, and uttered a cry.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to a long line of men that were filing along a road that joined the main one about where the camp was to be made.

"Looks like a procession," observed Broswick.

"They're miners, that's what they are!" cried Nestor, after a long look. "Every one has his pack on his back, his washing-pan and his pick and shovel."

"What are they coming this way for?" asked Ned.

"They are on the rush, seeking gold," explained the miner. "Word has come to the camp where they were that rich pay-dirt has been struck in some

locality. They all want to get at it, so they pack up and leave for the new field. Many's the time I've done it."

In a little while the foremost of the miners reached the auto camp. They seemed surprised to see the machine, but did not stop.

"What's your hurry, mate?" asked Nestor, of one big, brawny chap who was walking fast.

"Want to make as many miles as I can before sundown," was the reply. "There's rich diggin's ahead, an' I want to stake a good claim."

"Where might they be located?" asked Nestor.

"Why, ain't you heard? I thought every one had," answered the other. "They're in the lower part of Arizona, in what they call the Hop Toad District."

Nestor gave a start. The miner passed on, fearful lest even his brief stop would cost him his place in the cavalcade.

"The Hop Toad District!" muttered Nestor. "That's the district where my lost mine is located! I hope that hasn't been discovered. If it has it means all our work has gone for nothin'!"

CHAPTER XVII.

OVER THE MOUNTAINS.

On and on the stream of miners hurried. Several paused to stare at the automobile in wonder. Others passed by with never a glance. One man was mounted on a lame mule that made but little better speed than some of the pedestrians.

Three men, who seemed to form a party by themselves, came to a halt in front of the machine. They whispered together a few moments and then one stepped forward and addressed Nestor.

"Will you sell that machine for three thousand dollars?" he asked.

"I'm not the boss. You'll have to speak to one of these boys," replied the miner.

"How about it?" asked the man of Jerry.

"I hardly believe we want to sell," answered the latter.

"That's right," whispered Nestor. "There's some game afoot. Don't sell. There must have been a big gold strike lately to cause this rush!"

The three miners saw that the boys would not part with their machine, which the prospectors

wanted in order to make a quick trip to the new mining region. So they turned away and continued afoot on the trail.

For nearly an hour the stream of miners continued to march by. Then, as the last stragglers were lost to view, Nestor said:

"Boys, we're in a tight place. We'll have to hustle. Somehow or other news of the rich mining region near where my mine is located has leaked out. There's a rush, and we'll have to travel fast. We can't stick to our original plan. We've got to go over the mountains."

"Must we start right away?" asked Ned.

"The sooner the better," answered Nestor. "We'll have supper and travel night and day from now on. We'll have to race against not only Noddy Nixon and his gang, but these miners who have gone on ahead of us."

From what was intended to be a peaceful camp, that of the Motor Boys and their friends was turned into a mere resting place. Every one was filled with excitement, and Professor Snodgrass forgot to start on a collecting tour. He did not open his green box, and, with the others, ate a hasty meal.

As soon as Jerry had finished his supper he gave the auto a thorough overhauling. Plenty of oil was put on the bearings, the water tank was refilled from a convenient spring and the tires

pumped up. Then the holder for the carbide, from which the acetylene gas for the lamps was generated, was packed with the chemical.

"I'm ready when you are," announced Jerry.

By this time each one had finished his meal. The dishes were placed in the basket, Professor Snodgrass stowed his specimens carefully away and Hank Broswick tightened the saddle girths on his horse.

"Forward!" cried Nestor.

With a series of chug-chugs the machine darted ahead. The hunter urged his horse on and the adventurers were once more moving toward the hidden mine. It was going to be a bright, moonlight night, as could be told by the silver disk that was already rising above the trees.

"We'll hardly need the gas lamps," observed Ned.

"But it's better to have them," remarked Jerry, who had been selected to do the steering.

Leaving the broad and level road that led south over the plains, the adventurers headed due west. In a little while it was evident that the machine was going uphill, for the motor began puffing laboriously, and Jerry shifted the gear to first speed.

"We've struck the foothills," observed Nestor. "In a short time we'll be going up the mountain. Then, look out!"

Broswick rode along just behind the machine on

his horse. The animal was a steady trotter and managed to keep up to the auto, which was obliged to move slowly, as it had quite a heavy load on a steep grade.

For several hours the machine kept going. All the while the ascent became more and more steep until, at length, the adventurers found themselves well above the foothills and among the mountains.

"We'll keep on until about ten o'clock," said Nestor. "Then we'll camp for the night. We must get some sleep or we'll be all tired out."

Up, up, up went the auto. After quite a climb a small plateau or level stretch was reached, and there the going was easier. Jerry took advantage of it to run on the second gear. It was quiet, save for the mournful hooting of an owl now and then, as the machine made little noise, and no one felt like talking. All at once there came from the rear seat a strange sound.

"What's that?" asked Jerry.

"Chunky has fallen asleep and is snoring," answered Broswick, who was riding beside the machine.

"I reckon it's time we camped for the night," put in Nestor. "Here's a good stopping place. We'll make an early start in the morning."

The machine was halted, blankets were gotten out and a small camp-fire started. Tired and weary, the adventurers prepared for bed. Bros-

wick, who carried his blankets on his horse, said he would stand the first watch, and Nestor agreed to take the second, so the boys could get a full night's rest.

"I'll do my share," said Professor Snodgrass, anxious to be of service.

But Nestor said there was no need for the naturalist to sit up. To tell the truth, the miner was afraid that if the professor was left on guard he would forget what he was doing and wander off in search of specimens.

Silence soon settled over the little camp in the mountains. The three boys were slumbering peacefully, as was the professor. Broswick sat by the fire, keeping watch, and Nestor was rolled up in his blanket.

Suddenly, from down the slope up which the auto had come, sounded the blast of a trumpet.

"What's that?" cried Nestor, springing to his feet, for he was a light sleeper. He came over to where the hunter sat.

"Sounded like Gabriel's trumpet," replied the hunter, quietly.

"No; it was an auto horn," spoke Nestor. "A machine is coming up the trail. We must watch out. It may be Noddy Nixon and his gang."

Once more silence settled down, but to the trained ears of the miner and hunter there came the faint throbbing that told an automobile was ap-

proaching. Nestor loosened the revolver in his belt and Broswick reached over for his rifle, which he always kept near him.

Nearer and nearer came the machine. It reached the level stretch on which the adventurers were encamped and then the speed of the engine could be heard to increase. Nestor threw some light wood on the fire. It blazed up brightly, and the miner quickly drew Broswick back into the shadows of a big oak tree.

"We'll watch as they go past," he said.

A minute later an auto dashed by.

"There they are!" exclaimed Nestor. "There's that gambler, Pud Stoneham, and with him is Tom Dalsett, the man who knows where my mine is. I wonder how they got behind us. I thought they were ahead."

"I reckon we can keep 'em behind if we want to," whispered Broswick. He raised his gun.

"Hold on! we don't want to murder any one!" exclaimed Nestor, in a whisper, knocking the weapon up.

He was too late, as the hunter had fired.

"I wasn't goin' to do any damage," spoke the old man. "I only aimed to bust a tire. However, you spoiled mymark. The bulletwent over their heads."

"I thought you were goin' to shoot one of them," said Nestor.

Noddy, who, from the brief glimpse Nestor had,

could be seen at the steering wheel, increased his speed at the sound of the report, as could be told by the faster explosions of the motor. The noise of the rifle going off awoke Jerry.

"What's the matter?" he cried, sitting up.

"Your friend Noddy just passed by," replied Nestor, "and the hunter gave him a salute."

"I thought he was far away," said Jerry.

There was nothing that could be done, and the camp again settled down to quietness and slumber. There were no more disturbances, and at midnight Nestor relieved Broswick. Almost before the boys knew it morning had come.

Then, after breakfast, they were off once more.

There were no signs of Noddy's machine save the marks of the broad tires in the dust of the road. Leaving the plateau the adventurers were soon mounting toward the clouds again.

All the morning they hurried forward as fast as the auto could be urged. Broswick's horse kept well to the trail, for it was used to mountain climbing. At noon a stop was made beside a swiftly running brook and dinner was eaten. Then, after a rest beneath the trees, the journey was resumed.

About five o'clock another halt was made for supper, thirty miles having been reeled off during the afternoon.

"We'll do a bit of traveling as we did last night," said Nestor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TRICK OF THE ENEMY.

THE gas and oil lamps were lighted, and, as the sun sank to rest behind the hills, the auto began the night trip. The way was still upward, for the summit of the mountains had not yet been reached. Ned was steering and Jerry was on the seat beside him.

The machine topped a long rise and came to the brow of a small incline, the descent of which, on the other side, was quite steep.

It was now dark, for the moon had gone behind a cloud. The road was not of the best, and Ned had the machine pretty well under control. Down it went on the slope.

Suddenly Jerry gave a cry and reached over to shut off the power.

"Jam on the brakes!" he cried to Ned.

The steersman obeyed, and, with a grinding sound, the auto came to a halt, with a sort of jar.

"What's the matter?" asked Nestor.

"Some obstruction on the road; looks like a

log," answered Jerry. "I just happened to see it in time."

He got out and ran ahead.

"It's a tree cut down right across the path," he called back. "A big one, too. If we'd hit it, running as we were, we'd have gone to smash."

They all got out of the car and gathered about the obstruction. Broswick alighted from his horse and made a close inspection.

"This was done on purpose," he declared. "It has been freshly cut and was chopped on the side next to the road so's to fall right across an' block our way."

"I wonder who did it?" asked Bob.

"There's only one gang who could have an object in such a trick as this," said Ned.

"Who?" inquired Bob.

"Noddy Nixon's crowd. They want to delay us as much as possible so they can reach the mine first."

"I believe Jerry is right," put in Nestor. "This is one of the enemy's tricks, all right."

For a little while the adventurers stood and looked at the tree that obstructed their further progress.

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Ned.

"It's too big for us to lift out of the way," said Bob. "We'll have to wait until morning and then go get some axes and chop it in two."

"Don't do that," exclaimed Professor Snodgrass, so earnestly that the boys thought he might have some other plan to propose.

"Why not?" asked Jerry.

"Because there may be some valuable specimens of insects on that tree, little green or brown toads, katydids or other things. Let it stay there until morning so I may gather them."

"The tree is likely to stay there until morning, all right enough," observed Nestor, "so you'll have all the time you want, Professor."

"There's no need of delay," spoke Jerry, suddenly.

"How you goin' to git rid of the tree?" asked Nestor.

"I'll show you," replied the boy.

He ran to the back of the auto, took out a long, stout rope and fastened this to the tree, near the branch end. The other end of the cable Jerry brought back to the machine. This he now tied to the rear axle of the automobile, and then, getting into the front seat, he turned the machine around.

Gradually increasing the speed, he sent the auto ahead. The rope tightened, there was a straining, cracking sound and the tree was pulled to one side of the road by the power of the auto. The thoroughfare was left free for passage.

"I guess they didn't think of that," remarked

Jerry, as he replaced the rope and turned the machine around. "Now we can go ahead."

"Good for you!" cried Nestor. "We'll beat 'em yet, an' at their own game!"

They piled into the auto, and with Jerry at the wheel, went forward again, Broswick's horse keeping up. They traveled for about an hour longer and then Nestor suggested that as they had reached a good spot it might be wise to camp there for the rest of the night.

It was not long before every one was snoring in slumber. Ned was the first one to awake, and he did so as the result of a vivid dream he had that he was sliding downhill on top of a barrel, when it collapsed and threw him into a snow-bank.

He opened his eyes to find the ground all white about him, and about three inches of snow covering his rubber blanket.

"Where are we?" he called out, his voice awakening the others.

"A snow squall!" cried Broswick. "I thought we were gittin' high enough to have 'em. Waal, it won't amount to much."

"Are snow storms common here the end of September?" asked Jerry.

"They are when you git high enough in the mountains," replied the hunter. "Many's the night I've gone to bed thinkin' it was summer, to wake up an' find it winter, an' me sleepin' under

a foot of snow. The storms come up so easy you don't know anythin' about 'em."

"Will it last long?" asked Ned.

"No; it'll melt when the sun strikes it," was the answer. "But snow or no snow, we must have breakfast."

Broswick scraped away a place amid the white blanket and found some wood. A blaze was soon kindled, and the appetizing smell of coffee filled the crisp air. A hasty but substantial meal was made, and then the travelers, urged on by the call of gold in the mine they were striving to reach, took up their journey again.

As Broswick had said, as soon as the sun rose the snow began to melt and soon the landscape showed no signs of the winter costume it had masqueraded in. The adventurers were now close to the top of the mountain, and would shortly begin descending on the other slope. They had dinner beside a swift, cold brook, from which Broswick caught several large trout that made an excellent and very welcome addition to the meal, broiled as they were over the coals.

It was late that afternoon when the hunter, who was riding somewhat in the rear, came galloping up on his horse.

"I'm afraid we're in for it," he said.

"In for what?" asked Nestor.

"A rippin' old thunder storm," was the answer.

"The clouds back there are as black as ink an' the wind's drivin' 'em right this way. If I know anythin' of signs, an' I ought to, considerin' I've hunted in these mountains for nigh onto twenty years, we're goin' to have a regular rip-snorter."

"Snow one day and a thunder storm the next," observed Jerry. "This is a queer country."

Events soon proved the old hunter was right. The wind began to blow a regular gale and the clouds made the sky almost as dark as night. The auto was going downhill; Jerry was taking it along as easily as he could.

Suddenly the storm burst with a terrific peal of thunder that accompanied a blinding flash of lightning. It seemed to shake the very earth. Then came a regular deluge of rain.

"Run the machine under a tree," advised Nestor. "We'll be washed away if we stay in the road."

"There's a good place, just ahead!" shouted Broswick. "Under the oak. Leave the auto there and run for the cave!"

"What cave?" cried Jerry.

"There's one on the left side of the road, a little above the tree," said Broswick. "I've stayed in it often when I was caught in a storm. It'll hold all of us an' the horse."

The machine was halted beneath,the oak. Then, after rubber blankets had been spread to keep dry

the baggage in the auto, the adventurerers raced for the cave, led by Broswick.

They found the cavern to be a dry, roomy one, a natural hole scooped out of the side of the mountain. Once inside, the war of the elements could not harm them. They drew back from the mouth of the cave and listened to the heavy rumble of thunder and watched the brilliant lightning.

It seemed as if the very flood-gates were opened. The wind blew a regular hurricane, and the lightning was incessant.

Suddenly there came a dull rumbling and the cave was jarred by a shock. Then it grew as black as night.

"That struck somewhere!" cried Jerry.

"And near here!" exclaimed Broswick. "I'm afraid it was too close for comfort."

"Are we in any danger?" asked Professor Snodgrass, calmly.

Broswick had groped his way forward. He seemed to be fumbling in the darkness at the mouth of the cave.

"What's happened?" shouted Nestor.

"A rock has fallen and closed the mouth of the cavern!" cried the hunter.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AUTO STOLEN.

FOR a few moments the silence of despair was on every one. The knowledge that they were imprisoned in the cave came as a terrible shock.

"Is there no way out?" asked Nestor.

"Now don't you folks go to worryin'," spoke Broswick, in a more cheerful voice than seemed warranted under the circumstances. "I've been in tighter places than this, an' come out on top!"

"But we're buried!" cried Professor Snodgrass, who, for once, seemed to have forgotten all about his beloved specimens.

"That's nothin'," spoke Broswick. "You thought you was all goners when them cattle was comin' after you, but I got you out, an' I'm goin' to do the same now!"

"You can't burrow out like a rabbit," said Ned.

"I've got a little instrument here that will help me," said the hunter. "I never travel without a spade on my saddle. I've lost too many rabbits an' woodchucks through not havin' the means to dig 'em out, so I always carry a shovel along. I

reckon it will come in handy. If I only had a light now——"

"No need to worry about that," put in Nestor. "It would be a pretty poor miner that traveled without a bit of candle and some matches with him. I always go prepared for emergencies."

He struck a match, a yellow glow filled the cave, and soon a candle gave good illumination. The boys could see that the cavern was of large size.

"I've often stayed in here to keep out the rain," said Broswick, as he got his spade, "but I never was ketched like this before."

Guided by the candle, the hunter went to the mouth of the cave and began digging away the mass of earth and rocks that had slid down and obstructed the opening.

"Goin' to be quite a job," remarked the miner, as he looked over the mass. "It'll take a good while."

"There's plenty of us to do the work," replied Broswick.

He attacked the pile and made the dirt fly. After he had labored fifteen minutes Nestor relieved him. The miner, from his experience in digging into the earth, made more progress than had the hunter. Nestor kept at it for more than half an hour, refusing to yield the spade to any one.

"There," he said, when he stopped to rest, "I've made quite a hole."

The boys and Professor Snodgrass took turns, and then Nestor went at it again.

"I wish I had a drink," remarked the miner. "This is dry work."

"Nothin' easier," said Broswick. He took a second candle, which the miner had, and walked to the rear of the cave.

In a little while he returned with a big gourd full of cold water.

"What sort of a magician are you?" asked Jerry.

"There's a spring back there," explained Broswick. "Many's the time I've taken a drink at it and the last time I was here I brought this gourd for a dipper. Now it comes in handy."

Each one took a draught of the cool water and felt the better for it. Then Nestor insisted that he was going to continue the digging. The others wanted to relieve him, but he would not let them. He plied the spade vigorously and the dirt was scattered to one side.

"Light! Light!" the miner cried, suddenly. "I can see light! We're nearly out!"

A few more strokes of the shovel made the opening larger and then, with a shout and hurrah, the imprisoned adventurers rushed forward.

"Why! Why! It's night!" exclaimed Bob, as he emerged from the cavern and saw the stars shining.

"Of course it is," answered Nestor. "It was late afternoon when we took shelter in the cave, and we were there more than three hours."

"Well, we're out now," said Jerry. "I wonder if the auto was damaged."

The storm had ceased and the night was a fine, clear one. The moon was shining from a cloudless sky and thousands of stars were out. Jerry ran on ahead to the tree under which the auto had been left, for the machine was his chief concern.

He paused as he reached the spot. Then he rubbed his eyes and wondered if he was seeing straight. He even pinched himself to see if he was awake.

"What's the matter?" asked Ned, who was following close behind his chum.

"The auto is gone!" cried Jerry.

"Gone?"

"Yes. Stolen!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Nestor, running up.

Jerry pointed under the tree. There was not any sign of an automobile.

"That's funny," observed Broswick. "It couldn't fly away, that's sure." He led his horse from the cave up to the road and stooped down to examine the path closely.

"Let's have one of those candles," the hunter called to Nestor. Lighting the wick the old man examined the road with care, moving about in a

circle and then going backward and forward for quite a distance.

"Well?" inquired Nestor, when the hunter straightened up.

"Some one came along in another auto while we were in the cave," said the hunter, "pulled up here alongside of yours, hitched on to it and pulled it away, or else rode off in it."

"What makes you think so?" asked Jerry.

"I haven't hunted an' trapped twenty years for nothin', young man," was the answer. "I can see the tracks your machine made as it stopped under a tree. Then along comes another machine, with tires a leetle mite smaller'n yours. Auto No. 2 stops. Some one gits out from it an' looks over your auto, for I kin see marks of hob-nailed shoes, an' none of us wear 'em."

"Hob-nails, did you say, eh?" here interrupted Nestor.

"That's what I said.

"Then Tom Dalsett has been here."

"How do you know?"

"Look an' see if the soles of the hob-nailed shoes didn't have a cross in each one."

"They did," replied the hunter, inspecting the tracks.

"Then it's Tom Dalsett for sure. He always wore shoes like that, an' I seen 'em on him when he was at Dead Man's Gulch."

"Then Noddy and his gang have stolen our auto!" cried Jerry.

"That's about it," assented Nestor. "However, we mustn't give up yet. We'll take after 'em."

"Not much chance of getting them, though," put in Ned.

"You're welcome to my horse," said Broswick. "He ain't very fast, but he's better than nothin'."

"There's no use doin' anythin' to-night," was the miner's opinion. "We'd only get lost on the road, and I don't know but what we're lost already. We'll have to camp until mornin'."

After some consideration this was voted the best thing to do. It was a sorrowful band of adventurers that gathered about the fire which Broswick made, for the hearts of the boys were dispirited over the theft of their machine, and the men sympathized with them.

Fortunately, the hunter had some bacon left, and a meal, such as it was, the travelers made on this. Then, selecting the driest places they could find, they prepared to spend the night in the open, without coverings. It was cold, but by keeping a good fire going some comfort was had.

When the sun rose the adventurers got up, stretched themselves and wondered what they were going to do for breakfast.

"Leave it to me," said Broswick. "I'm used to providing meals."

He was gone some little time, and when he came back he had several plump birds. These were cleaned and were soon roasting over the fire on sticks. It was a good deal better meal than might have been expected under the circumstances.

Then, with the hunter riding his horse, and the others following, the journey in search of the stolen auto was begun. The marks made by the broad tires of the two machines could be plainly seen.

"I wouldn't care if I had my valuable specimens," wailed Professor Snodgrass.

"We'll git 'em, an' the auto, too," said Broswick. "Don't you worry."

They had covered several miles and were descending a long hill, when Jerry called out:

"What's that ahead, there?"

They all stopped and peered down the road.

"There are two autos!" cried Nestor. "One looks like ours. I'm going to see about it."

And he started off on a run.

CHAPTER XX.

ATTACKED BY INDIANS.

"HERE, come back!" yelled Broswick.

"What for?" shouted Nestor.

"Take my horse," said the hunter. "That's better than going afoot."

Nestor returned, mounted the animal and set off at a gallop toward the two autos, which were down in the valley.

"He'll never catch them," said Bob, in a despairing tone.

"You let him alone," came from Broswick. "He'll git 'em, all right. There's some trouble down there. One machine can't go."

"How can you tell?" asked Jerry.

"I've got sharp eyes, boy," was the answer. "I use 'em in my business."

In fact, as the boys observed closely, they could see that the two machines were not moving. They could also note men walking about the cars.

"Something's out of kilter," said Ned. "I guess they found plenty of trouble running two machines. I'll bet one of 'em is ours."

They watched Nestor descend the slope and approach the cars. As he came closer to them it was observed that there was some commotion among the persons grouped around the machines. They saw the miner raise his hand in the air, and little clouds of smoke arose.

"He's firing over their heads!" cried Broswick.

Then, all at once, the persons down in the valley, who, as the boys afterward learned, were Noddy Nixon and his gang, made a rush for the head auto, jumped into it and made off at top speed.

Nestor rode up to the remaining machine and waved his hat back to his friends. Taking this as a signal that all was right, they hurried forward.

"It was them, all right!" cried Nestor, when Jerry and the others had joined him. "I scared them off by firing in the air. There seemed to be something the matter with our auto, for they were trying to fix it."

The boys were worried lest some harm had befallen their machine. Jerry made an examination, however, and found things in good shape. There was some damage, and a battery wire had become disconnected, which had brought the machine to a stop, thus foiling the plans of Noddy.

"That was a lucky break for us," said Bob.

"You bet it was, Chunky," agreed Ned. "If we hadn't recovered the auto we would have had to

walk back home, and home is a good ways from here."

Repairs to the machine were quickly made, and then, with light hearts, the adventurers took their places and started forward once again.

Nothing in the car had been disturbed, and even the collection of insects made by Professor Snodgrass had not been harmed. The steady chug-chug and puff-puff of the motor was heard as the adventurers moved on up the mountain.

They stopped for dinner on top of a little hill in the midst of a grove of trees. A fire was kindled, coffee made, and some canned provisions set out.

"This is something like," observed Bob, smacking his lips over some preserved tongue.

"I'd have given five dollars for a cup of coffee last night," spoke Nestor.

"Me, too," said the hunter.

"I am so thankful my specimens are safe I could go without eating for a week," put in Professor Snodgrass, at which they all laughed.

Taking a comfortable rest under the trees until the afternoon sun went down a little, the adventurers were thoroughly enjoying the pleasant day. Suddenly Broswick started up.

"What is it?" asked Nestor, viewing with alarm the look of fear on the hunter's face.

"Indians!" was the answer.

"You don't mean real Indians?"

"That's what I do. There's a reservation of some kind about fifty miles from here, and they break loose every now and again."

"What makes you think some are loose now?"

"Hear 'em yellin' an' screechin'!" said the hunter, raising his hand to caution silence.

Straining their ears the adventurers noted the faint sound of some weird chant borne to them on the east wind. Then, as they watched, they saw, coming over the slope of the hill, a band of redskins, mounted on ponies.

"Hurry to the auto!" cried Ned.

He ran for the machine, followed by Jerry and Bob. Broswick picked up his gun and looked to the loading of it, as Nestor did to his revolvers, but neither of the men offered to retreat. Professor Snodgrass was intent on capturing some kind of grasshoppers, and did not seem to care whether there were Indians about or not. More and more of the savages came into view.

"Hadn't we better skip?" asked Nestor of the hunter.

"There are a few more than I reckoned on," was the reply. "I guess we may as well skedaddle if we don't want trouble. I don't know how my nag will run, compared to the Indian ponies, but——"

"Better get in the auto," suggested Nestor. "It will hold six on a pinch."

By this time Ned was frantically cranking up the machine. But, though he turned the flywheel with all his strength, while Bob attended to the spark and gasolene levers, the machine would not start.

"What's the matter?" cried Jerry, who had delayed, to pick up some of the baggage that was unloaded for dinner.

"She's stuck!" yelled Bob.

Jerry sprang to the cranking handle. His success was no better than Ned's. There were a few faint compressions, but that was all.

"Better start if you're goin' to," said Broswick, coming up. "They're almost here now."

"We can't start!" exclaimed Jerry.

"Then we'll have to fight!" observed Broswick, coolly.

Suddenly the air was filled with fierce howls and yells.

"You boys git in the back part of the machine," cautioned the hunter. "We men will attend to the redskins. Maybe they are only off on a holiday junket, account of bein' paid off by the Government. In that case they may let us alone. But they might be ugly, an'——"

Just then a bullet, with an angry zip, passed over Broswick's head.

"They're out fer business an' not fun!" he exclaimed. At the same instant he threw up his rifle

and fired. A howl of pain came in answer, and one Indian fell from his horse.

"I only took him in the leg," said the hunter, grimly. "No use killin' any if we can avoid it."

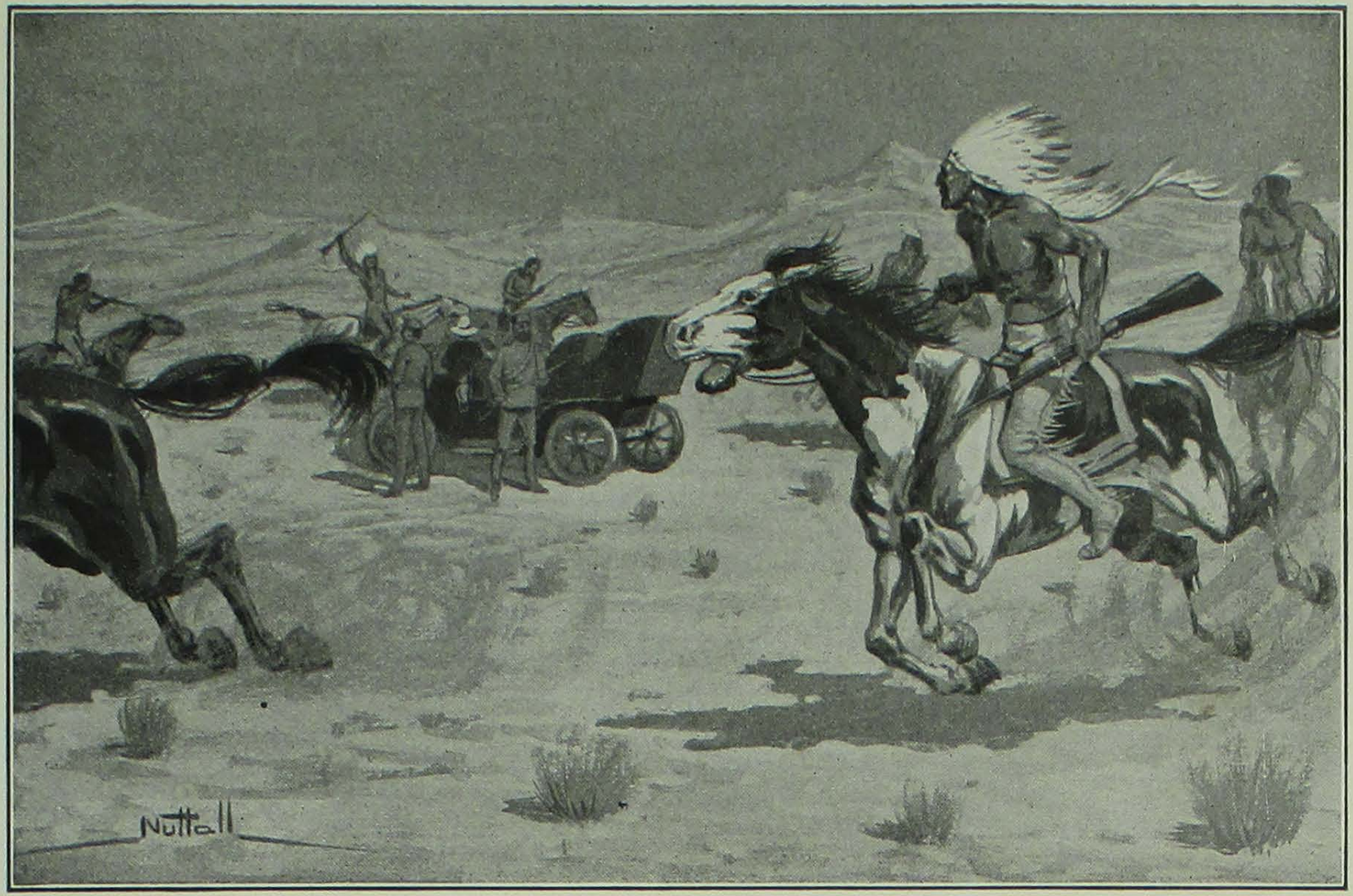
Jerry, Bob and Ned sank down in the tonneau. Nestor and the hunter lined up in front of the auto and stood with ready weapons. Professor Snodgrass, with a revolver, which Nestor had given him, seemed more afraid of the weapon than of the Indians.

Then, with savage yells, the band of redskins, who, as it afterward developed, had gone on a rampage from their reservation because they were dissatisfied with the Government rations, closed around the auto. They fired their guns off as fast as they could load them.

But, either because they were poor shots, or because they didn't want to hit the adventurers, the Indians did no damage. Several bullets came uncomfortably close, and one or two grazed the auto, but no one was hurt.

Then the savages, with whoops and yells, began circling about the machine. Around and around they went, riding their ponies at top speed. Suddenly, as if in response to some signal, they withdrew quite a distance, but still hemmed the travelers in a circle.

"They're up to some mischief," said Nestor.



THE SAVAGES BEGAN CIRCLING ABOUT THE MACHINE.—*Page* 152.

"Shall we wing one or two just to show we have bullets?"

"Not for the world," replied Broswick. "Our only hope is not to get them too riled. They may draw off an' leave us alone."

But this was not the Indians' intention. Once more they began making a wide circle about the auto.

"I see what the trouble was!" cried Jerry, looking over from the tonneau to the front of the dashboard. "The sparking plug was out. No wonder we couldn't start the machine."

He reached over and put the small brass pin in the proper socket.

"Now I'm going to have another try!" he called to Broswick and Nestor. "Get ready to jump in the machine!"

Before Nestor could stop him, Jerry had leaped to the ground. He ran around to the front of the auto, seized the cranking handle and gave several vigorous turns. As he did so a chorus of savage yells arose from the Indian ranks, and several more shots were fired.

CHAPTER XXI.

OVER A CLIFF.

THE bullets struck all around Jerry, but none of them struck him. Some of the leaden missiles hit the ground and made little clouds of dust, and others zipped on all sides of the auto.

All at once the explosions of the auto motor mingled with the banging of the Indians' guns. Jerry had started the engine.

"Get in!" he cried, leaping to the steering seat.

Broswick, Nestor and Professor Snodgrass obeyed the command.

"What about my horse?" cried the hunter.

"Let him go! It's you or the nag!" yelled the miner.

In another instant the whole party was in the auto and Jerry yanked the levers to full speed ahead. Off the car shot, Jerry steering for an opening in the circle of Indians.

With wild yells the redmen watched the auto glide away. They fired shots at it, and one Indian hit Broswick, but the wound was only a slight one.

"Here comes your horse!" shouted Bob, glancing behind, and, sure enough, Broswick's steed was galloping after the swiftly moving auto as though he was on the race track.

In a little while the adventurers left the Indians behind and were at a safe distance from any bullets. The hunter's horse, too, kept running, and got away.

"Well, we didn't bargain for this when we left home," remarked Jerry, as he slowed up the machine after an hour's run.

"I should say not," put in Bob. "Being attacked by Indians was the last thing I ever thought of."

"You're out in the wild an' woolly West," observed Nestor. "You'll see stranger things before you get through."

"I'd like to see something to eat right now," came from Bob.

"There goes Chunky," said Ned. "He's always as hungry as he was at home."

In spite of poking fun at the stout youth, every one felt the need of food. So a stop was made, a fire built, and soon coffee was boiling. Broswick went off in the woods with his rifle and came back with a brace of birds and a jack rabbit. What the boys voted was the finest meal they ever ate was quickly prepared.

"We must be careful not to lose the auto again,"

said Jerry. "We have had trouble enough with Noddy. The next time he may beat us altogether."

When camp was made that night a system of watches was arranged so that some one would be on guard all through the dark hours.

Nothing disturbed the adventurers, however, and in the morning they started again on their trip across the mountains, which, it seemed, would never come to an end.

Several days, including Sunday, passed without incident. No very fast time was made, and the machine had to be sent along carefully, as the roads were bad and the trail was uncertain to them. One morning Broswick announced that he was going off on a hunt. Nestor and Professor Snodgrass said they would go with him. Accordingly, the hunter's horse was tied near the auto and the three men set off, while the three boys remained behind to make some repairs to the machine and do a little necessary overhauling.

"We'll be back by dinner-time," announced Broswick; "that is, if something doesn't happen to us."

The boys were so busy that they scarcely noted the passage of time. It was not until Jerry looked at his watch and announced that it was two o'clock that the lads wondered what had happened to their friends.

"It's long past meal time," said Ned.

"Maybe they're not hungry," suggested Bob.

"More likely they're in trouble," spoke Jerry, an anxious look on his face. "I think we had better hunt them up."

This the boys decided to do, after getting themselves a light lunch. They ran the auto along the track the three men had taken, but after riding half an hour found no sign of their friends.

"Maybe we're on the wrong track," said Bob.

"Or else they didn't come this way," put in Ned.

They turned the machine around and rode back slowly, looking for marks along the road.

"There's something!" exclaimed Jerry. He pointed to a small match-box lying on the ground. "Nestor always carried that," he said. "It must have dropped from his pocket. The men have been here."

"Hark! What's that?" cried Bob.

All listened. To their ears came a faint but unmistakable cry.

"Help!"

"There they are!" called Jerry. "Over to the left! We must hurry to them!"

He sent the machine ahead at a swift pace. The road led along the top of a plateau and ran close to the edge of a cliff. As the machine neared this spot the cries became louder. Near the edge of the precipice Jerry brought the machine to a stop.

"They are down there," he announced, after listening carefully.

The boys dismounted from the car and approached the ledge. It went down straight for about fifty feet and then bulged out into a shelf before making a sheer descent to the valley, three hundred feet below.

Near the edge of the precipice the earth and rocks were freshly torn away, showing that something had gone over. Jerry got down on his hands and knees and crept to the edge. What he saw as he looked down made him spring to his feet and shout in mingled fear and astonishment.

There, on a jutting spur of the mountain, hardly large enough to hold them, were the three missing men.

"Are you hurt?" Jerry called down.

"Bruised and scratched, but no bones broken," shouted Nestor. "You'll have to haul us up some way, for we can't get down nor crawl up."

"Git a rope!" shouted Broswick, "an' lower it down."

"A rope! I don't believe there's one long enough within ten miles of here!" exclaimed Ned.

"Yes, there is," said Jerry, quickly. "We have the one they tried to hang Professor Snodgrass with—the same we used on the tree. It's in the auto. You get it, Bob."

In a few minutes a long rope was dangling over the edge of the cliff, and when the end reached the

men imprisoned on the ledge they set up a joyful shout. The boys retained their end and at a signal from Nestor, who had tied the cable about the professor, under his arms, Bob, Ned and Jerry began to haul away. They strained and pulled, but the man at the other end did not budge.

"It's caught!" exclaimed Ned.

Jerry ran forward, telling Ned and Bob to retain their hold of the rope. He found that the cord rasped against an edge of rock as it passed up from the depths below, and this produced so much friction that great force would have to be used in pulling the men up. Then, too, there was the danger of the rope fraying and being cut in two.

Jerry thought over the problem a few seconds.

"What's the matter up there?" asked Nestor.

"Never mind!" shouted back Jerry. "We'll have you up in a jiffy now."

He hurried over to a little clump of trees and came back with a short section of a round limb.

"This will be a roller for the rope to pass over, just like a pulley," he announced. Then he proceeded to put his plan in operation. Lying down on his face, he held the log in position, the rope passing over it. Then he told Bob and Ned to pull.

But even with this advantage there was trouble. The two boys managed to get the professor up a

short distance, but they were not strong enough to hoist him all the way.

"Help! help!" the naturalist cried, as he felt himself dangling.

"This will not do!" exclaimed Jerry. "Let him down easy, boys; I'll have to think of another plan."

It began to look as though the rescue of the men on the ledge was to be a harder task than at first supposed. At Jerry's direction, the end of the rope the boys had was fastened to a stake driven into the ground.

"Now I wonder what we'd better do?" mused Jerry. "We'll have to use the limb of the tree as a roller, and some one has to hold it in place. Yet it will take all three of us to pull one man up. If only one of the men was up here to give a hand we could manage. As it is——"

"I have it!" cried Ned, suddenly, and he ran back to where the auto stood.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CHASE.

NED reached the machine, cranked it up, and a few minutes later steered it close to where Bob and Jerry stood.

"The auto can do what we can't," he said.

"What do you mean?" came from Jerry.

"I mean it can pull the men up over the cliff!"

"Hurrah! So it can!" exclaimed Jerry. "I see your plan."

The car was turned around so the rear of it was close to the edge of the precipice. Then the rope was fastened to the axle.

"Get ready, down below!" called Jerry.

"We're ready!" came back the answer.

Jerry and Bob stretched out on the ground, each one holding an end of the improvised roller. Ned started the auto slowly. The rope strained and tightened. Then, as the car gathered speed, the cable was pulled up, and Professor Snodgrass, tied to the other end, was hauled from his perilous position.

As his head came into view over the edge of the

precipice, Jerry shouted to Ned to stop the car. The next instant the naturalist was helped to solid ground by the two boys. The plan had worked.

In quick succession Nestor and the hunter were pulled up in the same fashion.

"Well, I must say you boys are smart chaps," spoke the miner. "Automobiles are useful critters in more ways than to ride in."

"How did you ever get down there?" asked Jerry.

"It was all my fault," said Professor Snodgrass. "We were walking along, and I saw a particularly rare specimen of a little garter-snake. It was moving through the grass and I raced after it. It went over the edge of the cliff, and I reached down and tried to get it. It was so far over that I had to lie down flat on my face and stretch my arms. Then——"

"Yes, an' when he found he couldn't reach the critter even then," interrupted Broswick, "he asked Nestor an' me to hold his heels while he stretched down. Blamed if I ever do such a thing ag'in."

"Why not?" asked Bob.

" 'Cause jest as soon as me an' Nestor got hold of his heels an' was easin' him over the cliff, I'll be jiggered if the whole top didn't give way an' there we was, slidin' down the mountain at about forty miles a minute. I thought we was gone coons

sure, but we struck on the ledge an' that saved us."

"We'd been there yet if you boys hadn't come along," said Nestor. "But say, I'm mighty hungry."

"There isn't much to eat," spoke Jerry.

"Yes, there is," came from the hunter. "I shot some partridge jest afore we had that bloomin' old snake hunt."

He walked over to where he had left his game and came back with a double brace of fine birds. It was not long before the partridges were roasting over a fire and every one with a good appetite prepared to eat.

"Where's my specimen box?" suddenly exclaimed the professor, after an inspection of the auto. "It's gone!"

"No; I just laid it to one side when I wanted to use the machine to haul you up with," explained Ned. "It is safe. But what do you want of it now?"

"To put my snake in, of course," and the scientist showed a tiny serpent grasped in his hand.

"So you got it after all, eh?" asked Broswick. "I thought you missed it when them rocks an' dirt slid an' let us all down kersmash over the cliff."

"I wouldn't have lost that snake for ten thousand dollars," said the professor, as he put it safely away with his other curiosities.

After dinner the journey toward the lost gold mine was again taken up. In a short time the auto and its occupants, as well as Broswick on his horse, were making good speed. Presently it was noticed that the road was sloping downward. Jerry remarked on the fact.

"We've crossed the divide," announced Nestor. "From now on, until we get to the mine, we'll be going downhill. There's another rise of the mountains after we pass the mine, though."

It was now about five o'clock, and as the adventurers had eaten dinner rather late they decided not to stop for supper, but to keep on until it was time to camp for the night and have another meal then.

When it got too dark to go any further on the road, even though the gas and oil lamps gave a glaring light, a halt was made. Supper was eaten and soon all but Broswick, who mounted first guard, was slumbering.

Next morning the travelers came to a long, level stretch, on top of a vast plateau, and here good speed could be made. Jerry was steering the car, his turn having come around, and Broswick's horse was keeping up well, for the boys would not leave the hunter behind, and regulated their pace to that of his steed.

As they went around a curve and came to a straight stretch, Jerry cried out and pointed ahead.

They all looked, to behold another automobile speeding away from them.

"That's Noddy's car, I'm sure of it!" Jerry shouted. "I'd know it anywhere by this time."

"I'd like to catch those rascals!" exclaimed Nestor. "They've made trouble enough for us, an' they'll make more if they can. Besides, I have my score to settle with that chap Pender. I'd have overlooked it if they'd let us alone, but now I want to git even!"

"There's no reason why you shouldn't," said Broswick. "Your machine is as good as theirs. Give 'em a chase. If you catch 'em, put their auto out of business until you have enough of a start to get to the mine first. Besides, we could have the law on 'em for stealin' this machine."

"But what about leaving you behind?" questioned Jerry, to whom the thought of a chase after his old enemies was not unwelcome.

"Leave me behind; I'll catch up to you later," spoke the hunter.

Jerry looked at Nestor. The miner nodded his head in approval. The next instant the auto fairly sprang forward, as Jerry threw on the high-speed gear and opened wide the flow of gasolene.

The chase was on. Jerry sent out a challenging "honk" on the horn, and it was answered by the

auto ahead. That machine, too, as soon as the occupants became aware of the pursuit, went forward at top speed.

Fortunately for all, the road was much better than the average. It was wide and level, and as soon as the machines had warmed up they fairly flew along.

"Aren't—we go-going a—a—trifle fast?" asked Professor Snodgrass, in a frightened tone, as he held fast to the car-side to avoid being bounced out.

"That's the intention," said Nestor. "The other fellows are doin' it an' we have to do likewise. Hold tight!"

As he spoke, the auto went over a rock and every one was tossed from his seat, to fall back with a jarring bump.

The pace was now very fast. With straining eyes Jerry watched his rivals in front. Slowly but surely he could see that the distance between them was lessening. Once or twice some one in the forward car looked back to note the progress of the chase.

"We'll catch them!" yelled Ned.

Faster and faster went the auto. The trees and rocks seemed to shoot past. The distance between the two machines was constantly lessening until now it was but a quarter of a mile.

"They may use guns," ventured Bob.

"I reckon they will, son," replied Nestor, "but if they try that game they'll find we can shoot a bit ourselves."

He got out his brace of revolvers and saw to it that they were loaded.

"Not that I'm anxious to hurt any one," the miner went on, "but we must protect our lives and our machine."

Soon but an eighth of a mile separated the pursued and pursuing forces. The occupants of the other car could be plainly seen, and Ned, who was riding beside Jerry, noticed Jack Pender stand up in the rear seat and shake his fist.

"He wouldn't do that if we were a little closer," observed Ned.

Jerry now saw victory before him. He prepared to run to one side ahead of Noddy's machine and so block its further progress.

He was about to press the accelerating lever to give his car a momentary burst of speed when there suddenly sounded a great roaring. It seemed to come from the side of a small mountain along the base of which the plateau road now ran.

Then the air seemed to fill with dust. The very earth trembled and all at once a section of the mountain slipped down right on top of the pursuing auto, fairly overwhelming it.

It was a big landslide, and it had come just in time to catch Jerry and his friends and let the other

machine escape, for the auto Noddy and his gang were in got out of the way of the rush of rocks and earth.

There was a resounding crash. Then all seemed to become black to Jerry.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WRECKED.

When Jerry recovered consciousness he found himself sitting on the ground, while Ned and Nestor were bathing his head with water that Professor Snodgrass was bringing up in his hat.

"Where am I? What happened?" asked Jerry.

"You're still on the map," said the miner, "and as for what happened, it was what often happens out here. Part of the mountain parted company from the main hill, that's all."

"Is the auto smashed?" asked Jerry.

"It appears to be damaged some," replied the miner, and Jerry felt his heart sink. "But never mind that. It's lucky we're not all killed. You were struck on the head by a stone and knocked unconscious. The rest of us were just spilled out when the machine turned over. But how do you feel?"

"I'm all right, only a little weak," replied the boy. He stood up, and, aside from a little dizziness, he found himself in good shape. His head ached from the blow and was cut slightly, but he

was too anxious about the machine to mind his hurts.

With legs that trembled somewhat, he made his way to where the auto had overturned from the force of the landslide. The machine presented a sorry sight. The baggage was spilled out and things were scattered all about. There was a break in the water tank and the fluid had run out. The steering-post was also bent, and one chain was broken. What other damage was done could not be seen until some of the dirt was removed.

"I wish Broswick would come along with his spade," said Nestor. "We need him."

"There he comes now," spoke up Ned, pointing back on the road they had come. At the top of a gentle slope a figure on horseback could be made out. The man waved his hand. It was the hunter, and in a short time he came up to the wreck.

"Waal," he remarked, "looks like ye had trouble."

"We did," replied Nestor, and he told of the landslide. "But," he went on, "I reckon these boys know how to git us out of it. I'll stake my last dollar on these boys," and he smiled in a way that made the down-hearted lads feel better.

Broswick's spade did good service, and soon the machine was cleared of the dirt sufficiently to allow of its being righted. Then Jerry made a more

careful examination. As he went around on the right side of it he uttered a despairing cry.

"What's the matter?" asked Ned.

"The battery box is gone!" exclaimed Jerry. "It was carried away in the landslide, and we haven't another cell. We're stranded, sure enough."

He pointed to where, on the right step, a small, square box had rested. In this box were the dry batteries that supplied the spark.

Without the vital spark the auto could not advance a foot, and, as Jerry had said, the last of the spare batteries had been used and no new ones procured. The adventurers were certainly in dire straits.

"Maybe we can find the batteries somewhere in the dirt," suggested Nestor.

Acting on this idea, the boys and men made a careful search among the rocks and gravel that covered the road. They found the battery box, but it was splintered to pieces and not a single cell could be located. They went over every inch of the debris with no better result.

"Well, I reckon we're booked for a stay at this summer resort," said Nestor, with forced cheerfulness.

"It will be a good chance for me to get some specimens," said the naturalist, as if nothing mattered so long as he got some bugs or snakes.

"I reckon you'll have all the time you want," put in the hunter. "But speakin' of specimens reminds me that I'm hungry. I think I'll take my gun an' see if I can't pot somethin' for dinner."

"We've got to eat if we can't travel," observed Nestor. "Supposin', Bob, you an' Ned make a fire, while Jerry tinkers over the auto. Perhaps he can make it go, after all. We've had good luck so far, all but this."

Jerry shook his head. He knew that without the batteries the machine could not be operated. It was like trying to run an engine without a fire under the boiler.

However, he set to work to repair what damage he could. With a small soldering outfit he mended the hole in the water tank, stopping the leak. Then, with an extra link, of which several were carried, the broken chain was mended.

By this time Broswick came back with some partridges and rabbits and a meal, though it lacked many extras, was soon in preparation. After eating, Jerry went back to the machine. He took out the steering-post, and, with the help of Nestor, straightened it. Then some other small repairs were made, and, though the auto looked rather battered and battle-scarred, the paint being scratched in many places, it was still serviceable. All that was lacking was the battery box.

Jerry even filled the water tank from a nearby

spring, and then, not being able to do anything more, sat down on a stone and contemplated the useless auto, with sad eyes.

"No use cryin' over spilt milk," said Nestor, with rude philosophy. "What can't be cured must be endured. It's a long lane that has no turns, an' the longest way 'round is the shortest way home."

"Git a hoss! Git a hoss!" exclaimed Broswick, suddenly.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Nestor. "Gone crazy or are you gittin' your second childhood?"

"Git a hoss!" repeated the hunter, capering about like a schoolboy.

"What ails you?" demanded Nestor.

"Ain't that what the kids cry when they see a busted auto?" asked the hunter. "Seems to me I've read that in the funny papers. Am I right?"

"You be," said Nestor. "But what's the use of rubbin' our misfortune in?" he grumbled.

"I wasn't."

"Then what made you yell 'Git a horse'?"

" 'Cause that jest's what you're goin' to do!"

"Say, did you sleep in the moonlight last night, 'cause you must have, an' gone looney!" exclaimed Nestor. "You——" and then he stopped suddenly, as he caught the hunter's idea. "Well, I'll be ding-busted!" he finished, weakly.

"That's jest what you're goin' to do," went on

the miner. "My Kate is as strong a hoss as you'd want. We're goin' downhill most of the way, anyhow, an' it'll be easy for Kate to pull the machine an' us in it. There's a town about fifty miles ahead, an' maybe you can git some of them batter-cakes there."

"Batter-cakes?" repeated Ned.

"Yes. Ain't them what you want?"

"Batteries—dry electric batteries," said Jerry, with a smile.

"Waal, that's what I meant, only I spelled it wrong. They keep minin' supplies in this town, and they'll be sure to have batteries. Kate can pull us that far if we go slow."

Broswick's suggestion was voted a good one. The spirits of all were raised, and soon the hunter and Nestor busied themselves making a rude sort of rope harness for the horse.

The animal did not seem to mind pulling the auto, and, after everything had been collected, and some of the game the hunter had shot was packed to be taken along for supper at the next stopping place, the start was made.

It was slow traveling, compared to the former speed, but it was sure. The slight down-grade helped the animal dragging the heavy machine, which otherwise would have proved too much for one horse. The adventurers rode in the car, and Ned steered.

It was decided there would be no night traveling now, for they wanted to spare the horse as much as possible, and there was too much danger with the uncertain method of locomotion. So, when it grew dusk, camp was made and a fire built. Supper over, the travelers discussed the events of the day until, one by one, they fell asleep, after posting Ned as guard.

The boy took up his position in the shadow of a big tree where he could watch the auto and observe any one approaching within the circle of firelight. He was sleepy, but he fought off the drowsiness. Again and again his head would nod and he would just catch himself falling off into a doze.

"Come, this will never do," he said, shaking himself wide awake. "I must get a drink of water. Maybe that will make me feel more lively."

He walked over to where a pail of the liquid had been placed and took a long draught. As he was walking back to his place he started as he saw a bright shaft of light glaring through the trees about half a mile off to the left.

"That looked like a searchlight," whispered the boy. The next instant the unmistakable chug-chug of an automobile could be heard.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FORWARD ONCE MORE.

"If that's an auto, maybe we can get some batteries," thought Ned.

He hurried back to the camp-fire and awoke Jerry.

"There's an auto coming!" exclaimed Ned.

"Where is it?" asked Jerry, at once alive to the situation, and thinking of the batteries, just as Ned had.

The two boys listened. The chugging of the motor had ceased, but the searchlight was still playing over the trees.

"Maybe they're wrecked, too," spoke Ned. "Let's go over and see what it is."

"Better tell Nestor," suggested Jerry.

They woke up the miner and told him what they had seen and heard.

"Go slow," he cautioned. "Here, I'll tell you what to do. Jerry and I will take a look. No use runnin' into danger. It may be Noddy Nixon an' his gang, an' if it is, we've got to be careful."

Neither of the boys had thought of this. How-

ever, they realized the force of it. Bidding Ned to be on guard, Nestor set out, accompanied by Jerry. The miner had his revolvers ready and Jerry carried the hunter's gun. They did not intend to shoot to kill or injure any one, but thought the weapons would be useful in an emergency to scare off the enemy, if they should happen to meet one.

With great caution they moved in the direction from which the sounds had come. The white, glaring light was now stationary, and, like a giant finger, was pointing up toward the sky. It served as a guiding star for Jerry and Nestor.

"Let me go ahead," suggested the miner, when they had come quite close to where the light had its source.

Taking the advance, Nestor made his way through the underbrush and trees with great quietness. Jerry followed as best he could. Suddenly the miner stopped.

"I see them!" he whispered.

"Who are they?" asked Jerry.

"We've got to play a trick," said Nestor, without answering the boy. "Here, you go over there to the right, about five hundred feet, and fire your gun. Leave the rest to me, and as soon as you've pulled the trigger hurry back to our camp."

Jerry did not question the advice. He turned to the right, and, when he had gone what he thought

was the required distance, he discharged his revolver. A loud report crashed out on the silence of the night. Jerry heard a crackling of underbrush and several shouts. Then, as Nestor had told him, he made the best of his way back to camp.

As for the miner, he had remained where he was when Jerry left him. He was watching the other automobile, and something seemed to strike him as funny, for he chuckled silently.

"I reckon there's goin' to be some surprises here pretty soon," he remarked.

At the report of Jerry's gun, those about the automobile rushed off in the direction of the shot. At the same time Nestor, who was waiting for just this very move, ran in. He fumbled about the machine for a few minutes and then, clasping something tightly in his arms, hurried back through the woods to the camp, reaching there shortly after Jerry.

Those who had been left sleeping were aroused by the gun, and they were anxious to know what the matter was. Ned told his part and then Jerry related what had befallen him and Nestor.

"But what have you there?" asked Broswick of the miner, observing that Nestor carried something.

"A box of batteries," was the reply. "I took them off the other automobile. Now we can go ahead under our own power."

"But what—why—how?" began Jerry, with a puzzled look.

"I'll explain it all," said Nestor; "but, first, hadn't you better fix these batteries on our machine? We may want to start soon."

It did not take long for Jerry to make the necessary connections. Then, with the Cresville auto again in shape for flight, Nestor told his story.

"Who do you think the crowd in charge of the other auto was?" he asked.

"Give it up," exclaimed Bob, the quicker to find out.

"Noddy Nixon and his gang! As soon as I saw through the trees I made up my mind it was better to use cunning than force. I happened to see on their auto the same kind of a box that was taken off ours by the landslide. I figured that they had made so much trouble for us, the least thing they could do would be to lend us their batteries. So I jest reckoned I'd borrow 'em.

"I sent Jerry off to one side to fire a gun and draw their attention there. I knew they'd run when they heard the noise. They did, and I sailed in and yanked off the batteries. There they be."

Nestor seemed quite proud of his work. The boys were very glad to have their auto in shape again, and it was felt that Noddy and his crowd got no more than they deserved.

"They may trace us and make trouble," suggested Jerry.

"I reckon they'll have hard enough work in the dark," said Nestor. "But perhaps we'd better move on, an' git a good start of 'em. They may have extra batteries an' set out to chase us."

So, breaking camp, though it was still dark, the adventurers went forward once more, Broswick riding on his horse, that, no doubt, was glad to be relieved of the task of pulling the auto. The machine worked well, the batteries transferred from Noddy's auto doing good service.

It was daybreak before the travelers halted, and by this time they were well beyond where Noddy and his companions had camped.

"Here's a good place to stop," said Nestor, indicating a little clearing near a mountain stream. "We ought to get breakfast now."

For several days after this the trip went on without incident. The weather continued fairly good, with only an occasional rainstorm. The adventurers heard of the big rush of gold seekers to the district where Nestor's mine was located; but so far, they were ahead of the big crowd they had seen some time before.

"We'll git there fust, after all," said Broswick, as he sat astride his horse, that was now getting rather bony and thin from the long journey.

"No tellin'," rejoined Nestor. "There's a lot

of miners in this region, an' if they git to that mine ahead of us there's goin' to be trouble."

One afternoon, following a good day's run, the auto came to the end of the long mountain slope down which the adventurers had been riding for so long. They were now on a vast plain, or rather level valley, lying between two of the big mountain ranges. It was a pleasant country to travel in, and every one felt in good spirits.

"We're gittin' near to the place," said Nestor, on reaching the level stretch. "We'll keep on due west for a little while. I've sort of lost my bearin's, but I'll git 'em back in a little while."

He seemed somewhat worried, and was continually peering first to one side, then the other.

For several miles the auto journeyed on. No sign of human life was seen, though there were plenty of small animals and insects that Professor Snodgrass wanted to gather. But Nestor would hear of no delay.

"Hold on!" cried the miner, suddenly, as the auto passed a sort of trail leading up the valley. "This looks as if I'd seen it before."

Jerry brought the machine to a stop, and Nestor got out. He looked at the trees on either side of the trail and then came running back to the machine.

"It's all right!" he cried.

"What is?" asked Ned.

"We've found the lost trail to the mine," replied Nestor. "I didn't think I'd strike it this way, but we have. Forward! Now for the richest gold mine in the Rockies!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the boys, and Professor Snodgrass and the hunter joined in the cheers.

"Leave your horse here, Broswick," advised Nestor. "He'll be safe and the trail ahead is a hard one on animals. Get in the auto with us."

The hunter agreed to the plan, and his faithful steed was turned loose where there was plenty of food and water. Then, with the six in the auto, though they were rather crowded, the machine was started off toward the long-sought mine.

Suddenly, from down the valley, sounded the noise of another machine approaching. Ned turned around.

"Here comes Noddy Nixon!" he shouted.

CHAPTER XXV.

A RACE TO THE MINE.

BEFORE long Noddy Nixon and his crowd in their auto shot up alongside the Motor Boys and their friends. Noddy looked over and grinned, while Pud Stoneham raised his hat in mocking politeness.

"Hurry up!" said Nestor to Jerry, in a low voice. "They are going to give us a race to the mine. We must get there first!"

"What difference does it make?" asked the boy, as he speeded up his machine.

"All the difference in the world," replied the miner. "I've staked my claim, but I haven't filed the papers in the Government office, as the law requires. The first man who comes along could jump my claim now. I was relyin' on the mine bein' hard to find, but I see it has been discovered. We must beat them!"

"We'll do it if possible," said Jerry, with determination in his voice. "I wonder how they got in shape so quickly after we took their batteries?"

"Probably had another set," was Nestor's opinion.

The two machines were now moving almost side by side, up the defile which led to the mine. The autos were about two hundred feet apart and going at about the same rate of speed, which was not very fast, as the road was not of the best.

"How are you?" called out Jack Pender.

"None the better for seeing you," replied Ned.

"Thought you was smart to take our batteries, didn't you?" went on Pender. "Well, we'll show you a trick or two. We'll get to that mine before you!"

"You've got another guess comin', young man!" cried Nestor. "When I git through with you there won't be enough left to fill a hollow tooth. I've got a score to settle with you."

At this, Jack sank back in his seat. Bill Berry, who had been eyeing the Motor Boys, shouted out:

"If you cubs are lookin' fer trouble there'll be plenty of it. We're not in Cresville now, where all your friends are."

"I'm a born trouble-hunter!" exclaimed Hank Broswick, rising in his seat and carelessly leveling his rifle at the wheels of Noddy's auto. "I kin hit trouble a mile off!"

"Don't shoot!" yelled Noddy, trying to duck behind the dash-board and steer at the same time, with the result that he nearly overturned the auto.

"I wasn't goin' to," replied the hunter, with a grim chuckle. "I only wanted to let you know I was on hand in case I might be wanted."

After this the taunts from Noddy's gang ceased. In stern determination the race now settled down into a contest to see who should be first at the mine, for on that depended everything.

For nearly ten miles the two autos were close together, neither gaining any advantage. It began to get dusk, and the boys considered whether they should stop for the night or keep on.

"I think we had better camp until morning," advised Broswick. "We might git ahead of 'em, an', again, we might not. The chances are we'd bust a tire or sumthin', an' then we'd be worse off than before. Slow an' sure is better than quick an' never."

So, somewhat to Nestor's disappointment, the auto came to a stop when the road was no longer visible because of darkness.

"They're goin' on; I don't see why we can't," grumbled the miner.

"Too risky," replied Broswick. "We'll make better time in the end."

"Then we've got to start bright an' early in the mornin'," stipulated Nestor.

To this they all agreed. Supper was prepared and the guard set. The other auto, with a last mocking toot of the horn, had disappeared.

When the first indication of light in the east told that dawn was at hand, Broswick, who had the last watch, awoke his companions. A hasty breakfast was made and, even before the sun was up, the journey was renewed.

"I'd feel easier if I could git a sight of them other fellers," said Nestor.

"Do you s'pose they kept on goin' all night?" asked Broswick.

"Let's see if we can't pick up their trail," suggested Professor Snodgrass. "We can easily tell if an auto has preceded us."

Jerry stopped the machine and Broswick got out. He made a careful examination of the road and soon gave a yell that told he had discovered something.

"They're ahead," he announced, "but they made a stop here. The ground is all trampled up. I wouldn't wonder if they had a breakdown, an' had to halt for fixin' their shebang up. They can't be very far in advance."

With lighter hearts the adventurers started off once more, keeping a sharp lookout for the other auto. The sun rose high in the heavens, and it was hot in the valley. Mile after mile was reeled off, but Noddy's machine was not in view.

It was almost noon when Professor Snodgrass, who was peering intently ahead, suddenly uttered a cry.

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"I thought I saw a specimen of the almost extinct herds of buffalo," answered the naturalist.

"Buffalo!" cried Nestor, standing up to get a good view. "That's the other automobile you see!"

"So it is!" admitted the professor, taking a second glance.

"Put on all the steam you've got!" cried the miner. "We must catch them before night or the mine is lost! We're close to it now!"

Jerry opened the throttle wide and shortened the intervals of sparking. The automobile fairly jumped ahead, but so rough was the road that the travelers were bounced about like peas in a pod.

"We're gaining on them!" Ned shouted. "We'll soon be up to them!"

In a little while not more than an eighth of a mile separated the two machines, and this distance was gradually being lessened. Stoneham and Dalsett, who were in the rear seat, looked back and shook their fists.

"Not very pleasant chaps," commented Nestor. "Well, we don't mind how they look."

Five minutes later the autos were even, racing along the valley toward the coveted riches. The excitement of the race was too keen to admit of the wasting of breath in useless taunts. A tense

silence was preserved, broken only by the throbbing of the rival motors.

"Have we any water aboard?" asked Bob, about ten minutes after the two machines got on even terms.

"I guess there's plenty in the tanks," answered Ned.

"I mean to drink," went on Chunky. "I'm as dry as a fish."

"Now that you speak of it, I would like a cool cupful myself," admitted Ned. "Have we any, Jerry?"

"Not a drop."

The subject was not mentioned again tor some time. But once the idea had been broached it seemed impossible for Bob or Ned to get rid of it. Their thirst grew amazingly under the hot sun, and soon all the others were thinking how delicious some cold water would be.

"I've simply got to have a drink," said poor Bob at length. "I'll die if I don't get one."

He certainly looked as if he needed it. The others, too, were suffering the torments of thirst, for they had drunk nothing since early morning.

"Can't we stop and get some water?" asked Ned.

"If we do we'll lose several minutes," said Nestor, "and seconds will count now. Try and stand it a little longer. Make believe you are ship-

wrecked and can't get a drink. Sometimes sailors go for days without a drink."

"But they couldn't get it if they wanted to," spoke Bob, "and as for us, there's a spring right alongside of the road," and he pointed to one ahead.

Jerry was about to turn up to it and stop, but Nestor urged him to keep the auto going.

"We don't want to lose everything, when we're jest about succeedin', all fer a little water," he said. "Three hours more will see us at the mine. If we stop now they'll beat us."

"I'll give my share in the mine for a good drink," wailed Bob.

"So will I!" chimed in Ned.

In truth, the boys were suffering severely. So were the men, but they were used to hardships, and the thought of the gold ahead made them indifferent to the wants of the body.

"See, we're coming to a river," went on Ned, pointing to where a bridge could be seen spanning a stream. "We can get water there."

"And lose the gold mine!" exclaimed Nestor, fiercely. "No, sir! We don't stop until we're on the ground. Then you can get all the water you want."

He seemed so excited that the boys were somewhat afraid of him, though they knew it was all due to the strain of the moment. To add to their

discomfiture, they could see the other gold seekers in their auto taking copious drinks from bottles of water.

"My throat is all parched up!" cried Bob. "I must have water!"

"So you shall!" shouted Jerry.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GOLD!

"Do you mean to stop the car and let them git ahead of us?" demanded Nestor.

"I'm going to stop the car," replied Jerry, "but they're not going to get ahead of us."

"How you goin' to prevent it?"

"I'll show you. Wait until we get to the bridge."

The two machines were close together and the bridge was now about an eighth of a mile ahead. Suddenly Jerry shifted the lever to throw the third gear into place, at the same time opening the throttle. The red auto fairly sprang forward, leaving the other behind.

At first, Noddy, who was steering his machine, was too surprised at Jerry's move to know what to do. When he did attempt to speed up, the other car was several hundred feet in advance. Two minutes later Jerry had reached the bridge and brought his auto to a stop.

"There!" he exclaimed. "I guess we can hold them here as long as we like. The other car can't beat us, can it?"

"I should say not," answered Nestor. "You're a slick one, Jerry!"

For the bridge was so narrow that there was but room on it for one auto at a time. With Noddy's car in the rear, it could not go ahead until Jerry was ready.

"We'll all have a drink!" exclaimed Broswick. "I'm as dry as a powder-horn myself."

There was a general rush to the stream, which proved to be a clear, cold, mountain brook, and never did liquid taste better than that to the thirsty adventurers. They had not half enough when Noddy's machine came puffing up, but was forced to stop.

"Pull your machine out of there or I'll ram you!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I guess not!" said Nestor, slowly. "This is a public road."

"I'll show you whether it is or not," went on the bully, in a blustering tone, reaching for the lever to send his car ahead. His intention was to push the other auto off the bridge.

"Not so fast," spoke Nestor, slowly, carelessly drawing his revolver from the holster. "Those are very pretty tires of yours, but it's no fun ridin' on 'em when the wind is out. So go easy, Mr. Noddy Nixon!"

"We'll fix you for this!" cried Dalsett.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" asked Nestor, in seeming

surprise. "Well, I wouldn't crow too soon if I was you. It might not be altogether healthy, you know."

The other remained silent. The boys finished drinking, and, at Broswick's suggestion, filled several cans with water, and placed them in the auto.

"Come, are you going to stay there all day?" growled Noddy.

"As long as we please," answered Nestor. "We know what you're up to, but we'll beat you yet."

"The mine belongs to whoever stakes it first," put in Dalsett.

"I see you know the law right enough," spoke Nestor. "But I wouldn't advise you to get too well acquainted with it. There are some little matters in New Mexico the law might want you to explain," and he smiled at his former helper, whereat Dalsett turned pale and muttered beneath his breath.

But, having satisfied their thirst, the adventurers had no longer any motive for blockading the bridge. They started off, Jerry getting the motor up to a good speed before throwing in the gear, so that the car moved off swiftly at the start.

Like a flash, Noddy was after them. Once more the race was on. The sun reached the zenith and began to decline in the west.

Nestor was greatly excited. He was on familiar ground now, and saw landmarks on every side.

As the auto passed a dead sycamore tree he shouted:

"Only two miles farther now! Then, hurrah for the gold!"

The other machine clung doggedly to the Cresville auto. Jerry was going as fast as he dared, and Noddy was close behind. A few minutes more would tell the tale.

"One mile farther!" shouted Nestor.

The next instant there came a report like a revolver shot. Every one started, thinking they had been fired at.

"They've busted a tire!" shouted Broswick. "I reckon that puts them out of the race!"

Noddy was obliged to bring his machine to a sudden stop. There was a scene of confusion as the crippled machine was forced to give up the pursuit. Berry and Dalsett seemed to be urging Noddy to continue in spite of the accident, but, rash as the bully was, he knew better than to go on with a collapsed tire.

Jerry never slackened the speed of his auto, and rushed on, intent on the goal that was now so near. Ten minutes later the road came to an abrupt end against a slope of the mountain.

"Well?" asked Jerry, throwing out the gear and leaving the auto with the motor still running, panting like one who has run a long race. "What next? We can't go any farther."

"We don't need to," replied Nestor.

"Why not?"

"We're at the mine. It's on top of that hill," and Nestor indicated a little knob that rose about two hundred feet away. "Come on, we'll take a look at it."

Jerry shut off the power and, leaving Professor Snodgrass in charge of the machine, the others climbed up to the mouth of the shaft of the long-lost mine that Nestor had so luckily discovered.

A rude ladder led down into the depths below. Lighting some candles he had with him, Nestor descended, telling the others to come, but to use caution, as the ladders were old and rotten.

With hearts that beat high in hope, the boys went down into the mine. The first level was about fifty feet under the surface. Coming to a halt, Nestor lit several more tallow ends.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

The boys stared in wonder. Gold, gold, gold seemed to be on every side of them. It cropped out in the dirt and rocks; big yellow veins that glowed with a dull gleam in the flickering lights. The sides of the mine were traversed with the streaks of precious metal. Most of it was very pure, and it could be dug out with a knife.

"It's the richest mine I ever saw or heard of," said Nestor. "There's enough gold in sight to

make us all rich, even if no more develops as we dig farther down. It's a great strike!"

"It certainly is," agreed Jerry. "But can we establish a claim to it?"

"The mine will stand in our joint names before another day," replied Nestor. "I'll start for the Government office the first thing in the morning, after I've staked a claim for each of us."

"Providin' Noddy Nixon an' his crowd don't make more trouble," spoke Broswick.

"They're broke down," answered Nestor.

"Nothin' to prevent 'em from walkin' here," went on the hunter. "Howsomever, if they come we'll be ready for 'em. Now let's git supper."

Taking a last look for the day at the riches around them, the adventurers climbed to the surface. They went to where they had left the automobile, made a fire and were soon preparing a simple meal. Broswick's ready gun provided enough for supper and also insured a feast of rabbit and partridge for the next day.

The adventurers were so filled with thoughts of their success at reaching the mine first that they sat around the camp-fire until almost midnight, going over the happenings that had befallen them on their journey. Then, the first watch having been assigned to Nestor, all the others sought their blankets, and stretched out on the ground to sleep.

The hours of the night passed without incident.

There were no sounds save, now and then, mournful hootings of the owls and the bark of foxes. Jerry had the last watch, from three until six o'clock.

He was sleepy when Broswick aroused him to take his place, but soon was wide awake enough.

"Anything happened?" he asked the hunter.

"No; but keep your eyes open. We have to deal with a hard crowd, especially Dalsett. If you hear any one approaching, fire in the air first and then challenge."

Jerry took up his vigil. To keep himself awake he walked back and forth out of range of the light from the camp-fire. Once or twice he thought he heard sounds as of some one approaching, and he nerved himself for a struggle.

But each time it proved to be only timid foxes that, with startled eyes, came to see who had invaded their woods and glens.

Just as dawn was about to herald itself by a pale light in the east, Jerry heard a sound as of some heavy body coming through the underbrush. He was on the alert in a moment. Peering forward, he saw the dim outlines of a man approaching between the trees. The next instant Jerry fired in the air, and called out:

"Who goes there?"

The reply was a volley of shots.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BESIEGED AT THE MINE.

In an instant every one at the gold camp was on his feet. Broswick reached for his ever-ready rifle and Nestor had his revolvers out in a jiffy.

"What is it?" called the miner to Jerry.

"I heard some one coming, and I fired," replied the boy.

"Did you see any one?"

"I thought I saw a man, but I'm not sure."

"You're right! It was a man, and that man is on deck now!" replied a mocking voice, but no one was in sight.

"That's Dalsett!" cried Nestor. "I know his voice. Come out where I can see you, Dalsett!" went on the miner. "But I s'pose you're afraid to show your sneakin' face!"

"It's healthier where I am," said Dalsett, "but, just to show you that we have the advantage—how's that?"

A shot followed his voice, and a twig was clipped from the tree above Nestor's head. Instinctively, the miner ducked.

"We've got you surrounded," went on Dalsett. "You may have the mine, but we have you, and a heap of good the claim will do you when you can't file your papers!"

In a rage, Nestor fired in the direction of the voice, aiming high, as he did not wish to seriously wound even an enemy when there seemed to be no need. A mocking laugh followed. At the same time there were several shots from different points surrounding the camp, showing that it was indeed encircled.

"It looks as if they had us, don't it?" asked Broswick.

"Not by a long shot!" replied Nestor, heartily. "I've only just begun to play this here game. Before I'm through I'll make Noddy Nixon and Tom Dalsett wish they'd never bothered me."

"What shall we do?" inquired Jerry.

"Get breakfast," answered Nestor, promptly. "We'll need food for what's ahead of us."

A stealthy movement in the bushes attracted his attention.

"So that's their plan, eh?" he murmured. "Hank, take your gun and go up to the mouth of the mine shaft. If any of that gang tries to approach, shoot to wound but not to kill. They were trying to sneak up to the mine and gain possession," explained Nestor, in reference to his directions to the hunter. Broswick hurried up the slope.

Jerry and the other boys proceeded to get the morning meal. As for Professor Snodgrass, he was walking around, gathering specimens, as though danger was a thousand miles away. Nestor, with weapons ready, kept sharp watch.

They ate breakfast by turns, keeping a lookout lest the enemy might attempt to rush the position. But this did not seem to be the plan of the besiegers. They were content to keep close watch so that those in possession of the mine could not leave.

As an experiment, Nestor tried it. He walked a little way down the valley. He had not proceeded far before there was a spurt of dust at his feet and a voice cried:

"Better go back, Jim. You'll be all right as long as you stay in bounds, but if you go out there'll be trouble; so I advise you to keep quiet."

"Wait till I git hold of you, Tom Dalsett!" cried the miner, shaking his fist in the direction of his invisible foe.

"Oh, I expect to be here some time, so I'll wait," was the reply, and Nestor could only turn back.

Just before noon the miner called a council of war. He explained that it was very necessary for him, or some one, to get to a Government office and file a claim on the mine.

"It's a case of first come, first served in this minin' business," explained Nestor. "Those chaps may be on the way now to register their papers, an'

if they are we'll lose the claim. I'll bet that's their plan, an' that's why they're keepin' us cooped up here!"

"How far is it to the Government office?" asked Jerry.

"A matter of thirty miles," replied Nestor. "It's about five miles beyond where we turned up into this valley. But what's the use talkin'? We can't git away while they're on guard with guns."

"We all can't, but one of us might," suggested Jerry.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I will go and file the papers."

"How will you manage it?"

Jerry explained his plan. Nestor nodded in approval, and hurriedly told him how to comply with the necessary legal forms. The miner hastily filled out a paper, gave it to the boy, and remarked:

"Now we'll try that trick of yours, Jerry."

In accordance with the plan Jerry had proposed, every one but himself started toward the top of the hill where the mine shaft was located. Jerry stayed near the automobile. The others took no pains to move quietly, but laughed and talked.

Reaching the top of the slope, at a word from Nestor, they made a rush down the other side, at the same time firing their revolvers wildly in the air.

As Jerry had expected, the ruse worked. The

force of besiegers, thinking an escape was being attempted, ran around the other side of the hill to intercept it. Led by Dalsett, Noddy and his crowd drew up in the underbrush at the opposite foot of the slope to trap the supposed fugitives.

At that instant Jerry sprang to the auto. Like a flash he had the motor going, and a second later he had leaped into the seat and was off down the valley. A ringing cheer by his comrades, together with the chugging of the motor, told the enemy what had happened. They realized that they had been fooled, and had been drawn away on a false alarm.

"Quick! After him, Noddy!" cried Dalsett. "Jump in your auto! You must overtake him before he reaches the Government office, for he's going there to file the claim. That's what we'd ought to have done instead of monkeying here."

Noddy needed no second bidding. His auto stood ready a short distance down the valley. He ran to it, started the motor, and was after Jerry in a few minutes. It was another race for the possession of the gold mine.

Returning to their camp, much pleased at the success of their stratagem, Nestor, the boys and Professor Snodgrass got dinner. Broswick was still on guard at the shaft, but Nestor relieved the hunter a little later, allowing him to eat and take some rest.

As for the besiegers, they seemed to have settled down to dogged waiting, for they gave no sign, though an occasional movement in the underbrush showed they were still on guard.

Meanwhile, Jerry and Noddy were racing on. Jerry had a good start and sent his car along at a fine speed. The road was rough, and several times he struck large stones that caused the auto to bounce unpleasantly.

Now and then Jerry would glance back to see if his enemy was in sight. After a run of about two miles he caught a glimpse of Noddy's machine coming after him.

"Now we'll see who has the best car, and who is the best driver," reasoned Jerry, and his spirits rose at the prospect of the race.

For several miles Jerry held his lead. Then he noticed that Noddy was gaining slightly. Jerry could feel that his motor was not running as smoothly as it should, and no wonder, for it had been through strenuous times. He used all his skill in operating the various valves, gears, levers, but, do the best he could, he saw Noddy slowly though surely creeping up on him.

"He must not win!" exclaimed Jerry, fiercely, to himself. Then, though it was a dangerous thing to do, for the road was very rough, he opened the gasolene throttle still wider, and the car bounded forward at greater speed.

This temporary advantage was soon lost, however, and Noddy came on relentlessly. For an hour the race continued. The autoists left the small valley leading to the mine and turned into the broad defile.

"Five miles more!" thought Jerry, recalling Nestor's directions.

The next instant, with a rush and rattle, Noddy's car came up alongside that of Jerry's. They were now on even terms.

"I s'pose you thought you'd beat me!" sneered the bully.

"The race isn't over yet," answered Jerry.

But in truth it looked as if it was, as far as Jerry was concerned. Noddy gained inch by inch, until his car was a good length ahead. The bully looked back with a mocking smile.

One mile was reeled off, and but four remained of the distance to the little town where the Government office was located. Another mile; then another. Noddy's car was now five hundred feet ahead, and Jerry was running his machine as fast as he dared, though not to the limit.

There remained but another mile as the cars shot into a long, straight stretch. In the distance Jerry could see a small town. Noddy was an eighth of a mile in advance.

"I'm going to lose!" exclaimed Jerry, and he felt his heart sink.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WINNING THE CLAIM.

THERE was but half a mile more. The two autos were now on the outskirts of the settlement, and men gathered in the single main street to watch the race.

Suddenly Noddy's car skidded and he was forced to shut off the power. This allowed Jerry to gain a little. He quickly saw his chance. Resolving to risk everything, he turned on full speed and pressed down the accelerator pedal.

His car lurched forward with such suddenness that the youth was almost pitched from his seat. But he caught up to Noddy. The latter saw the advantage that had been gained and tried a desperate measure.

Turning his steering wheel he swerved his auto over toward Jerry's, intending to strike him a glancing blow and upset him.

But Jerry was too quick for him. He got out of the way, though only just in time. Then he glanced up and saw, about one hundred feet in advance, a white building, with a sign reading:

GOVERNMENT ASSAY OFFICE.

He brought up his machine with a jerk by applying the emergency brake. Almost before it stopped he leaped out, but his coat caught on the steering wheel and he fell in the dusty road.

At that instant Noddy dashed up in his machine. He was quick to see what had befallen Jerry, and like a flash was out of his car, and, with a proof of claim in his hand, he rushed for the door of the assay office.

"No, you don't!" yelled Jerry, springing to his feet.

He took after Noddy and caught him just as the bully was about to enter the office. But one thought flashed through Jerry's mind. He must beat Noddy.

He drew back his fist and, with a powerful blow that caught the bully right on the chin, sent him sprawling away from the doorway and into the dusty street.

"I want to file this claim," panted Jerry, an instant later, handing the astonished Government clerk the proof Nestor had made out. The boy had done the only thing possible under the circumstances to enable him to get into the office. He had knocked Noddy aside and gone in ahead of him, winning by the margin of a second.

The commotion caused by the two automobiles racing into town, the conduct of the two boys, and Jerry's action had attracted quite a crowd about the

assay office. People fairly filled the rough shack in which the agents of Uncle Sam did business, and the claim clerk was so startled by the suddenness of the whole transaction that he stood motionless.

"Aren't you going to file and record that claim?" asked Jerry, looking out of the window and seeing Noddy limp to his feet.

"I—I don't know—of course I am—that is——"

"He isn't goin' to do anythin' until I have somethin' to say," interrupted a rough voice. "I'm sheriff of this county, an' I'd have you automobilists know that you can't come here lickity split an' not pay the damage. I'll arrest you both for exceedin' the speed limits."

"What is the legal limit?" asked Jerry, anxious only about getting his paper filed.

"Seventy miles an hour."

"My machine can't make over fifty if I was to run it at full speed on a beach track," replied Jerry, hotly.

"Well—er—maybe I'm a leetle off on figgers," admitted the sheriff. "It may be seven miles, but you're both arrested—er—um—fer disturbin' the peace. There, I guess you can't git around that. I may be a leetle mite hazy on law, but I ain't on fact. Do you deny that you disturbed the peace?" and he turned to Jerry.

"I admit I knocked him down," said the boy,

nodding toward the bully, who was entering the room. "I'm willing to pay a fine for that if I may file this paper. How much do I owe you?"

"We can't do business in that loose way," spoke the sheriff, with a great sense of his own importance. "This must go through a regular form. You'll both have to go before the judge. I'll arrest you both."

"But can't I file this paper?" insisted Jerry. "You can arrest me just the same."

"One thing at a time," went on the sheriff. "You come with me; let the judge hear the case, an' if he finds you not guilty you can come back here an' file fifty papers if you want to. But you can't now, an' I forbid this clerk to take any papers from anybody until I come back."

Jerry fretted at the delay. It was easy to see that in this rough, western town the authority of the sheriff was paramount. At first Jerry thought it might be a trick put up to benefit Noddy, but when he saw the bully was not allowed to file his papers either, he became convinced that the sheriff thought he was acting within his legal rights.

Followed by a big crowd, the officer led his two prisoners toward the rude shanty where the judge held court as often as it was necessary. Noddy was plainly in a great rage, but Jerry took it all as good-naturedly as he could.

"You wait till Pud Stoneham and Tom Dalsett hear of this!" blustered Noddy to the sheriff. "They'll make trouble, for they told me to be sure and file that paper as soon as I could."

"What names did you say?" asked the sheriff.

Noddy repeated them.

"I'd give a good bit to see Pud Stoneham just now," remarked the officer, in a peculiar voice. "But I guess he don't want to see me."

"I'll tell you where you can find him," spoke Jerry, quickly, surmising how the land lay.

"Where? Tell me, quick, boy! Are you tryin' to fool me?"

In a few words Jerry told about the mine, and how he had left his friends besieged there by the gambler and his companions.

"It's our mine, and I tried to file the claim before Noddy Nixon did," finished Jerry.

"And you'll do it yet," said the sheriff, heartily. "Here," he called to the crowd, which came to a halt, "this case is adjourned indefinitely."

"Ain't there goin' to be a trial?" asked several, disappointed in what they thought would furnish excitement.

"Not now," replied the officer. "This boy, Jerry Hopkins, is paroled in my custody. Noddy Nixon is paroled in the custody of Bill Lamson, an' I'll appoint you a special deputy for the occasion, Bill. You take charge of Noddy until sundown,

when you kin let him go. An', mind, if he escapes I'll court-martial you, Bill."

"He won't git away," said the new deputy, confidently.

The crowd had already begun to disperse, finding there was to be nothing to interest them. Lamson went away with Noddy, who vainly protested against being detained.

"Now take me to Pud Stoneham," said the sheriff to Jerry. "I've been lookin' for him for 'most a month. He's wanted for a dozen crimes. Well, well, this is luck!"

"What about filing the claim?" asked Jerry, not losing sight of his important mission.

"You kin attend to that right off," was the answer. "Then take me to the mine an' I'll attend to Pud Stoneham."

Jerry lost no time in filing a formal proof of claim to the mine, and saw the record made in the Government books. Then, with a lighter heart than he had known for many a day, feeling that at least part of the hard work was over, he went to the auto, where the sheriff was waiting.

"I'll take you out in the car," said Jerry.

"I'd a heap sight rather have a mule," commented the officer, eyeing the machine with a suspicious glance, "but I s'pose this is quicker. Don't upset, now."

"I won't," promised Jerry. "But, Mr. Sheriff,

hadn't you better take some help along? Pud and Dalsett are well armed."

"That's so. I'll swear in a couple of deputies," said the officer. "Here, you," he called to two men passing by, "come with me, I may need you. Hold up your right hands. You swear to do whatever I tell you to, all right. I owe you fifty cents apiece, but you'll have to git change. Never mind now, jump in the shebang. We're after a man."

Then the sheriff paused to take a much-needed breath. The two men, who didn't seem surprised at being so suddenly called on to act, took their places in the machine and Jerry started off.

He exulted in his success, for he knew that, no matter what happened now, the mine stood in the names of Nestor and the adventurers, including himself. All that now remained was to get the gold out.

Jerry sent the machine along at a good clip. Mile after mile was covered and at last the auto turned up the little valley leading to the mine. As the machine neared the hill in which the shaft was sunk a sound of firing was heard.

"They're fighting!" cried the boy, as he increased the speed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FIGHT AT THE MINE.

As the auto came near, the shots became more distinct. It seemed as if a small-sized battle was in progress. Jerry stopped the car about a thousand feet away from where the camp had been.

"Take it easy until we see where we're at," advised the sheriff. "There's too many bullets flyin' around for comfort."

He got out of the machine and began creeping along on the ground on hands and knees. His deputies followed his example, and Jerry thought it well to do likewise.

It was soon evident that an attack was being made on the hill, where the forces of Nestor seemed to have entrenched themselves. Stoneham, Dalsett, Berry and Pender were drawing nearer under cover of the underbrush and were firing as they advanced. Nestor and his crowd were replying with shot after shot, though most of the bullets were high in the air.

"If I could only get a line on where they are,"

muttered the sheriff, "I'd be all right, but I can't see a thing in these bushes."

All at once the firing from the top of the hill ceased.

"I guess they're out of ammunition," said Jerry. "They didn't have very much when I came away."

"Then it's time we did somethin'," remarked the sheriff. "There, I see 'em now. Come on, boys!"

The two deputies followed him on the run, and Jerry kept as close as he could.

Suddenly the sheriff came to a halt. He motioned with his hand for the others to keep quiet. Then the officer began creeping at a slow pace. He halted once more and waved to the others to approach. They did so with all the caution possible.

"We've got 'em!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Pud Stoneham and the rest of 'em are down in a little hollow just below us. They are gettin' ready to make a rush, I think."

Peering over the edge of a little bluff on which the sheriff's party stood, Jerry looked down and saw the gambler, Bill Berry and Jack Pender, each with a revolver, crouching down and peering forward. They were within a few hundred feet of the shaft, and Jerry could dimly observe Nestor and his friends grouped about the mine.

They seemed to be making a last stand. The truth of the matter was that, as Jerry had surmised,

they were out of ammunition and could no longer reply to the fusillade that Stoneham and his crowd kept up. For a time there was a lull in the firing.

Then the shots began again, coming from Stoneham, Berry and Pender. But they did not seem to be aiming to kill or even wound those guarding the mine. Desperate as the gambler was, and great as was his wish to get the gold claim, he would not resort to extreme measures. So he and the others were firing over the heads of those they were attacking. They hoped to scare them away.

If they could do this, and rush in, securing possession of the claim, they would, under the mining laws, provided that Noddy had filed the claim, be masters of the situation. But something was about to happen.

The sheriff was watching Stoneham like a cat. The gambler and his friends were unaware how close they were to danger, and continued to fire above the heads of the party at the shaft.

From their point of vantage the sheriff, his deputies and Jerry watched what was going on below them. They saw Nestor, Broswick and the others waver, for the firing was hot, and they did not know it was a harmless one.

"Come on!" yelled Stoneham, suddenly. "We've got 'em! Come on, an' take the mine!"

The gambler leaped to his feet, flourishing his

revolver. Pender, Berry and Dalsett prepared to follow him.

"No, you don't!" cried the sheriff.

The officer leaped forward, over the bluff, and shot downward. Full and true he fell, right on the back of Stoneham, bearing him to the earth.

"I say! What's this? Oh, let me up!" yelled the gambler.

"Not until I've fixed you so's you can't do any damage!" exclaimed the officer, drawing out a pair of handcuffs and fastening them on Stoneham.

The gambler struggled hard for a few seconds. Then, finding it was of no avail, he lay quietly at the sheriff's feet.

"Where'd you come from?" he asked the officer.

"Oh, I took a little run up here in one of them new-fangled gasolene gigs," replied the sheriff, with a grin. "I heard you were up here an' I felt I couldn't get along without havin' a little conversation with you."

"Um!" grunted Stoneham.

Dalsett disappeared into the bushes at the instant the sheriff had jumped on the gambler's back, and was soon lost to sight.

"Never mind him," said the officer, when he saw that capture was not possible. "I didn't want him, anyhow. It was Pud I was after, an' I got him."

"What'll we do with this lad?" asked one of the deputies who had grabbed Pender.

"Pl-pl-please don't ki-kill me!" cried the boy, a coward, now that his side had lost.

"Kill you!" exclaimed the sheriff. "The worst that'll happen to you will be a good spankin'. That's what we do to babies out here!"

Pender showed no inclination to escape, nor did Bill Berry, who stood sullenly to one side.

"Get up!" the sheriff commanded Stoneham, and the gambler struggled to his feet. His air of bravado was gone and he hung his head. "I'll take you back to town in a little while," the officer announced.

There was a crackling in the bushes and, cautiously parting them, Nestor stepped into view.

"What's happened?" he asked Jerry.

"It's all right," replied the boy. "I filed the claim, I beat Noddy, and this is the sheriff, who has arrested Mr. Stoneham."

"Good for you!" cried the miner. "We've been havin' a pretty lively time since you went away, an' you got back just in time. So the papers are filed, eh? Well, that gives us the mine now, an' we're all rich!"

"I'd rather have Mr. Stoneham here than a gold mine," remarked the sheriff.

"Is he so valuable?" asked Nestor.

"He is to me," was the answer. "There's a reward of five thousand dollars for his capture for counterfeitin' money, an' besides that he's wanted

on half a dozen charges. When I heard he was here, I jest hustled, I tell you."

It was getting dusk now, and, after a little thought, the sheriff decided not to take his prisoner back to town that night.

"If you don't mind, I'll camp out here with you," the officer said to Nestor, and the miner extended a hearty invitation. Soon supper was prepared and partaken of sitting around the camp-fire.

Stoneham's hands were unshackled long enough to enable him to eat, but the sheriff guarded him closely. He was not going to have his captive escape if he could help it. Pender and Berry ate in dogged silence.

After supper, when the men had lighted their pipes, Nestor told the sheriff the story of the trip to the gold mine. The official was much interested.

"It's a good thing you have the claim to your mine filed," he said. "I understand there's a great rush of diggers this way. They were at Eagleville yesterday, a town about twenty miles from here, and I expect they'll be stragglin' in here to-morrow. Whenever there's news of a gold strike the miners are on the trail like a hound after a fox."

The moon rose over the trees and made the glow of the camp-fire seem like a tallow candle beside an electric light. The forest was flooded with the radiance and it was almost as bright as day.

"I could almost go out and gather some speci-

mens," remarked Professor Snodgrass, who had said little since the exciting events of the afternoon.

"What do you want most?" asked the sheriff.

"I'd like to get—look out, there! Don't move for the life of you! Wait until I get my net!" cried the professor, suddenly, staring at something close to the officer.

"What is it, a rattlesnake?" asked the sheriff, somewhat alarmed at the professor's excitement.

"Don't move! Don't move!" was all the naturalist replied.

"Well, if it's a snake you can bet your boots I won't stir until you've got it," answered the sheriff. "I seen a man bit by one once and he didn't last half an hour. But say, my friend, don't be any longer than you can help. It's sort of a strain on my nerves, you know."

"Softly! Easy!" spoke the professor.

He had his net now and was tiptoeing up to where the officer sat, close beside Stoneham.

"There!" cried the professor, slapping the meshes down on the ground. "I've got him!"

"Have you got the rattlesnake?" asked Jerry.

"Rattlesnake?" inquired the naturalist, gathering something carefully in the folds of the net. "Who said anything about a snake? I've just captured a white lizard, one of the rarest that exists. It's worth one thousand dollars."

"Well," exclaimed the sheriff, "it nearly scared

me to that amount, the way you acted. I thought sure I was goin' to be hit by a snake."

After the excitement, unintentionally caused by the professor, had quieted down, and he had put his lizard away with his other specimens, it was voted time to turn in. Blankets were brought from the automobile to serve as coverings, and the fire was replenished.

In order to be sure his prisoner would not escape, the sheriff tied Stoneham to a big tree. As an additional precaution the officer passed one end of the rawhide thong about his own arm, so that the slightest movement on the gambler's part would be noted.

Then Nestor, who agreed to take the first watch, began pacing up and down in front of the camp, while the others fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN ESCAPE—CONCLUSION.

At midnight Nestor awoke Broswick, who was to take the next watch.

"All quiet?" asked the hunter.

"As a churchyard," replied the miner.

"How about Berry and Pender?"

"They haven't moved."

"All right; turn in."

Nestor was soon snoring, and Broswick began his vigil. The moon began to move over toward the west, and the only sounds heard were the hoots of owls or the barking of foxes.

Suddenly the hunter paused in his walk about the camp. His trained ear told him somebody or something was approaching. He could hear the breaking of twigs and the rattle of stones as they were stepped on.

"That's a human being," decided the hunter. "No animal would be as clumsy as that in making an approach."

He waited, with his rifle ready.

"If it's some one coming to rescue Stoneham

they'll get a warm reception," he whispered to himself.

The noise came nearer. Then the bushes off to the left parted cautiously, and Broswick heard a soft whisper:

"Hey, Bill! Hey, Jack! Where are you?"

"It's that Noddy Nixon chap," Broswick muttered. "He must have come back in his automobile after the deputy sheriff released him at sundown. Now I wonder what I'd better do?"

"Hey, Bill!" Noddy called, in a little louder whisper, "can you sneak away? I have the machine ready."

This time a movement near where Bill Berry and Pender were lying told that they had heard the summons. Broswick silently drew back into the shadows and waited to see what would happen. He did not think it necessary to arouse the others yet.

Berry rose to his feet and peered about him. Jack followed. They were trying to locate Noddy's whereabouts.

"Here I am!" whispered Noddy. "Right by the oak tree."

As quietly as they could, Pender and Berry began sneaking off to one side, avoiding the light cast by the camp-fire.

"Shall I let 'em go or stop 'em?" debated Broswick with himself. "Guess I'll let 'em go. We

don't want 'em, for they're more trouble than they're worth. But I'll give 'em a good scare."

He raised his gun and fired two shots in the air, over the heads of the escaping man and boy. Their frightened yells told how startled they were.

In an instant the camp was in confusion. Every one awoke, Nestor standing ready with a revolver in either hand.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"Only Noddy coming back for his two friends," replied Broswick.

"Have they escaped?"

The hunter raised his hand to indicate silence. A crashing of the underbrush told in which way the fugitives were heading.

"There they go," said Broswick.

The sheriff had quickly assured himself that Stoneham was still securely bound.

"Shall we take after Noddy and Pender?" asked Broswick.

"What's the use?" asked Nestor. "If we had them arrested it would only make trouble for us. Let 'em go. I got some of my gold back from Pender."

"Yes, let 'em go," assented Jerry.

"Hark!" exclaimed Ned.

All listened. The faint chugging of an automobile was heard, gradually dying away in the distance.

"I guess that's the end of 'em," remarked Nestor.

Once more quiet settled down on the camp, and there were no other disturbances that night. The shining of the sun through the trees awoke the campers, and soon coffee was made and a simple breakfast ready.

"Now if one of you will run down to town in the automobile, with me and my friend Stoneham here," said the sheriff, "I'll be obliged to you."

Jerry agreed to make the trip, and Nestor said he would go along, as he wanted to do some business at the Government Assay Office. The mine was left in charge of Broswick, Professor Snodgrass, Ned and Bob.

"Don't let anybody jump the claim," cautioned the miner with a laugh, as he rode off, Jerry steering the automobile down the valley.

"There'll be trouble if they try it," said the hunter, looking at his gun.

No accidents occurred during the automobile trip. Town was safely reached, and the sheriff lodged his prisoner in jail. Nestor transacted his business with the Government agent, and then Jerry headed the machine back for the camp. There they found everything in good shape.

"Now that our troubles are about over, an' we're in possession of our mine, it won't be a bad

idea to dig out a few nuggets for luck," said Nestor.

"Can we have one?" asked Bob.

"Why, sure, Chunky," replied the miner. "The claim's part yours, jest as it is mine. We're goin' to share an' share alike in this deal. I'd never have got to this mine if it hadn't been for you boys. Have a nugget? Well, I guess yes."

They went to the top of the hill, and Nestor and Jerry descended the shaft. This second trip more than confirmed the first view of the richness of the mine. The rocky sides of the shaft were fairly studded with small nuggets. Nestor dug out some with his knife, and Jerry did likewise.

"There's about one hundred dollars," remarked the miner after half an hour's work, showing a handful of dull, golden pebbles. Jerry had about the same amount.

"Now we've got to git ready to work this claim," said Nestor. "I'll attend to all that, seein' as how I'm familiar with the business. But, first, we'll go up an' show the others what we have."

As they neared the top of the shaft they heard quite a commotion on the surface. The voices of men in dispute could be heard.

"I wonder what's the trouble now?" Nestor said.

Coming out of the shaft he found the summit of the hill surrounded by fifty or more roughly

dressed men, all bearing mining tools on their backs. They stood in a circle while Broswick, with cocked rifle, was holding them at bay.

"What's the matter?" asked Nestor.

"They allowed they was goin' to jump this claim," said the hunter.

"Excuse me, pardner," spoke one of the crowd, who seemed to be a sort of leader, addressing his remarks to Nestor. "I take it you're in charge here?"

"That's what," replied the miner.

"Waal, we ain't goin' to jump nobody's claim. We're a bunch of miners, an' we've come all the way from Spread Eagle Valley to this region, hearin' as how there was good claims here. Are we right?"

"You be," replied Nestor, "an' you're welcome. There's the stakes of our claim," and he indicated them.

"All filed reg'lar an' 'cordin' to law, I s'pose?" went on the spokesman.

"Right," answered Nestor. "You can locate anywhere you like outside of my claim."

"That's all we wanted to know," went on the other. "Come on, boys!" he called to his companions. "It's all right!"

The whole valley was soon a scene of great activity, with miners staking claims on every side. They were eager with the desire for gold.

Within a week the whole region fairly swarmed with the gold seekers, for the section was rich with the precious metal. But no claim was as valuable as that of the lost mine which Nestor and the boys had found.

Arrangements were made for working the claim, machinery was ordered, and soon pay-dirt was being taken out in large quantities. A more comfortable log cabin was erected in place of the rude shack that served as a temporary shelter; and the boys began to enjoy life in the new diggings.

One of the first things they had done when they were sure of the possession of the mine was to write back home and tell their parents of the good luck.

Jerry suggested that in the missives each one should ask permission to remain at the gold mine for some time longer, and perhaps make a further trip before returning to Cresville.

"I wonder if we'll get any letters by this mail?" asked Ned one evening, when, after the day's work was done, they all sat about the camp-fire.

"We'll soon know," said Jerry. "Here comes Nestor back from town, and it looks as if he had something in his hand."

The miner approached, riding Broswick's horse.

"Here's the postman!" he cried, waving some papers in the air. "Letters for each of ye!"

Three anxious boys opened three envelopes and

soon were busy reading the missives. Then came three simultaneous whoops of delight.

"I can stay!" yelled Bob.

"Me, too!" exclaimed Jerry.

"And me!" came from Ned.

"I don't blame your folks for lettin' ye stay," put in Nestor. "You're makin' money here every day out of this mine."

The parents of the boys had wisely concluded that it would be a good experience for their sons to develop the mine further, since they seemed to be in good hands under Nestor's guidance, and able to take care of themselves.

"We'll have no end of good times," said Bob, trying to turn a handspring on the grass, but tumbling down in the effort.

"I'd feel better if I was sure we had seen the last of Noddy and Pender, as well as Bill Berry and that Dalsett chap," spoke Jerry.

"Oh, they'll never bother us again," came from Ned. "They're running like scared rabbits. We'll never see them again."

But Ned was wrong. They did meet Noddy and his three companions once more, and under strange circumstances, as will be related in the next volume of this series, to be entitled "The Motor Boys in Mexico; or, The Secret of the Buried City."

"Let's go to bed," suggested Jerry, as the camp-

fire died out. And they went to their bunks in the log cabin as the moon rose over the trees and cast a silver gleam over the machinery at the shaft of the gold mine.

The Motor Boys' trip overland had panned out very well, indeed.

THE END.

The Motor Boys Series

(Trade Mark, Reg. U. S. Pat. Of.)

By Clarence Young

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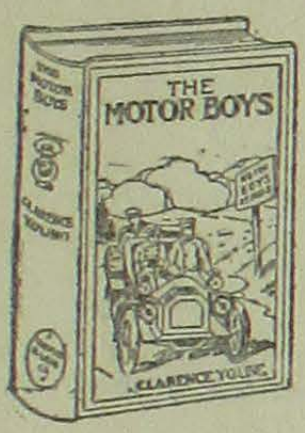

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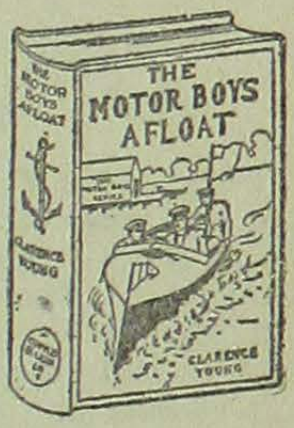

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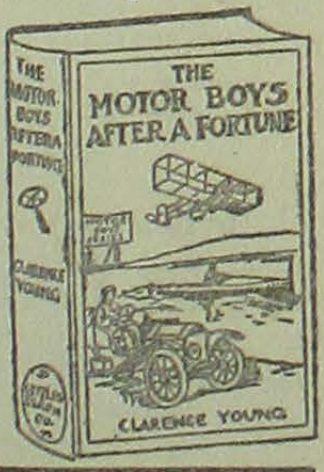

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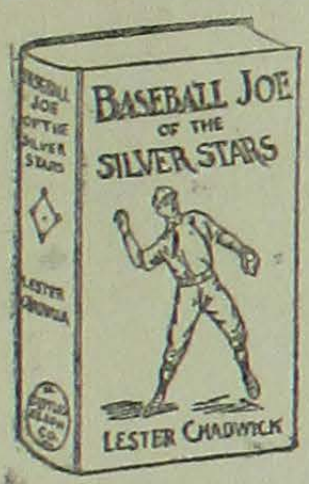

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